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TIME TORN TO STARS

OR THE UNITY OF THE CREATIVE ACT AND THE IMAGE AS MUSIC

by JACK LINDSAY.

The poet attacks the tiredness which thinks everything has been done and which regressively appeals to an abstraction of primitive vitality.

I. He analyses Time, contrasting the Platonic equipoise with the Christian self-repugnance and hints at the solution in love.

II. He analyses consciousness as unity, discarding both the modern schools of Sensationalism and abstract Intellectualism, and placing the dynamic Form against them.

III. He shows that the Platonic Form must be assimilated through the embrace.

IV. He mocks at the weak spirits who expect love to furnish them with a complete gesture of delight readymade.

V. He shows the orientation of the poetic image which must result if musical energy is absorbed, and welcomes the new Cleopatra. [August, 1928.]

PRELUDE

CORROSION of salt among our watery minds,
a thin voice said, are words: not the dry salt
making strips of cowmeat last the longer
and feeding our minds lean with mastery,
stalking life like lions. It said words;
therefore to have no words is sudden drums
and stars sown with one twist of the hand are midnight.

But though words are old mortar from dead walls
that once held men alive with loneliness
and sheer defiance of the coughing foe:
are perisht oakum spewed from a sprung seam
in ships whose voyagers made out of Time
dark bells and a slow roll of hidden drums
and stars one scattering of their foamy prows;

yet since the word led on those voyagers
they feared, so they might hear fear's arrow clang
on the taut bravery of the lifted word:
they loved, so they might sow the midnight sky
with foam off figureheads of Victory.

Is it their fault now that this yell of knowledge
dies into tinkles of beribboned sheep
browsing in meadows that the courage cleared?
For there are fields ahead where the drum beats
and midnights where no prow has ever burst;
and there the word must walk among drums and stars.

PART I

TIME has been torn to stars. I saw her hand
take Time and tear it up to shining pieces
which lay upon the waters lilily
or washed in paler foam upon the sand.
Now Time is torn, I said. Her hand releases
beauties of dangerous lucidity——
how may I kiss?
since mouths must quiver slenderly to red
or curl upon the withered rose's stalk,

THE RAGGED POET

Reproduction of an Etching by Norman Lindsay

leaving that patch of rotting emptiness
to hurt the soul until the soul is dead.
Come with me, dear, I said,
for though love knows no words we two must talk
before I stain your beauty on this bed.

Plato could undress statues easily,
stripping the spangles from a virgin sky,
because that blue was marble puffed to clouds
at every alternating harmony
as Time's mosaics glittered slowly by.
So far they had not felt the feet of crowds
bruising each gem
till in a brittle darkness it must shed
its pulse of light and utter its still breath
of colour on a fading clover-stem
diffused about the grass where Venus bled.
So Plato's beauty fled
before the honey-stars of heavy death
and all the angels dimming overhead.

Time was to Plato this thin spangled dress
wound round the thighs of lovely images.
He did not blur Time's face on his crusht lips
but coolly lifted up the tumbled stress
and neath pale linen made for ever his
some intellectual ghost with wanton hips.
That was his way.
But ghosts take flesh if once they are allowed
to claim their pasturage upon our cheek,
and so they closed about him in fine spray
of spiritual bodies lean and proud,
a flocking winglike cloud
of loins forced out of inert space to seek
his flesh and make it their sweet-smelling shroud.

Time had been angles of the tangled light
shifting about the happy musing faces.
Its moments logically joined or snapped
in constellations of returning flight,
and flame-sopt flowers in the meadow-places
burned in and out of Time, which slowly lapped
a circling shore
and all the heavens subtly deeper still
and still the same blue heavens stippling stars
night after night grooved deeplier as before.
There he could undress statues at his will
because the light would thrill
into a texture from the mind's old wares
which the clear stone, within, would slowly fill.

So life thinned into veils of tautening light
behind which gods died into living stone;
but when the tense pure veil was widely drawn,
frayed tendrils bleeding on a sudden night
shattered the quiet bodies: ghosts were blown

amid star-briars till the ragged dawn,
and man awoke
to find himself beleagured in an hour
by his own flesh, which crawled about his bed
a mess of horror. Time at that wild stroke
which broke from the top cranny of its tower,
raved in a stormy shower
over the earth and dripped away and spread
in broken spasms of dim curled face and flower;

then died. Time died, and all the ghosts were wailing.
The million bells of scent across the earth,
each tolled a death, and Time became a scroll
sealed with dark names and magicks unavailing
to bring the mummy to its honeyed birth
among the rotted unguents of the soul.
Time stretched out wide,
written with judgments endlessly: again
Time stretched serene, now being dead. So we
must twirl it back to life with laughter and pain
and yet ourselves contain
its scattering stars in our eternity.
I have done: this bed with beauty let us stain.

PART II

To be oneself: with noise the phrase returns
out of the smoke of dawn's fallen pyramids.
Man is so thinly witted that he learns
no more than one thing at a time; and so
forgets the past truths, and they all become
mere partial guesses at the full round sum.

Unity we must seek, yet as life bids
must let that unity be crackt to faces
bubbling around us in unlikely places . . .
the girl I saw come up the lavatory-stair,
stepping from one shy fierceness to another
across the brink of quiet, like a goddess;
and you, with kisses tangling all your hair,
human enough to have a dirty bodice.

We must reduce both girls to their far Mother
crinolined Venus in the dwindling Moon.
We must relate their gestures, each to each,
and make the kisses that their beauties teach
blend at the last, whatever earthly twist
has snared the identity your mouth has kisst
and tamed, with heavy eyelids and bent knees,
to love's warm patient preciosities:
kisst kisst and kisst and kisst and kissed till she
clears to a goddess rondured tactually.

We must suck Venus dwindling to the Moon
across each body . . . soon, but not too soon.

Therefore, proclaiming as our tumbling goal
multiple action in a unified soul,

we find at last that love alone can give
knowledge of life by making knowledge live
and all life knowable: a dual game
where form and substance strive to grow the same.
Metaphysicians know far less than whores
the subtle balance whereby life allures
the souls it needs to tremble out of life
back into life, and on, while Time endures—
or we endure as symbol of our strife
Time which spreads out the bloodbeat into space
and hangs across the Sun our masquing face;
then at the twinge contracts in abject fear
and space comes ruining back upon us here.

I have heard gods behind the withered names
speak, like the Music petalled in the stone
of a great statue and shut behind the doors
of clanging silence, never to be blown
through reeds that sigh as one whole day of love
in any single stop. They spoke to me
and clarified my thickly smouldering aims.
They put a sweet aspiring agony
for ever in my flesh, which sometimes stuns
my mind like Music blasted into Suns.

They blast my mind, with music, into Suns.

I turn once more to them, who were my friends
in days before life held such angry ends.
A noise has come between us: now no longer
the voices cherish me. I would be stronger,
not merely lured from sky to milky sky
tilted like wide wings of a Butterfly . . .
lured by their fingers delicate with lust.
I have bent down to the toil and toil I must.

With unity like milk of dawn it starts;
but unity is more than all its parts:
the moths of light come scattering at my call,
for life is not a mere machine which fits
cogwheel and spring, piston and screw, and all
the intellectually considered bits
of self together. Being more than all,
like the Sun churning mid light's conflagration,
it is even more than any mere relation
linking the parts. And so the self is seen
to be, in everything, unlike the machine.

It is a wind, a spiraling Desire
foaming to water, thickening to fire.

We have no Image which can catch as one
the self: no more than we can net the Sun
in webs of its own light and drag it down
to sell for curios about the town.
What is the self then that we cannot say
one word about its essence any way

without at once submitting to a lie?
Yes, even though the instant of clear thought
reconcile opposites, that flash must die
before we catch the Image that is sought.
Before the lightning, darkness; and behind,
trees flung and rushing meadows on the mind—
not the whole earth in rich and sombre flight
aspiring to a jagged crevice of light,
and at the same time dasht from out that crack
of unity and struggling to get back.

Must we despair then that we cannot touch
reality, because we lose so much?
Must we say: Nothing stays, the tree flows on
among the matted glitters, and is gone.
The Sun soaks all the sky in slippery gold,
the clouds grow hulks of beauty, then are old
and sunk in a blue nothingness which blurs
the charnel-ribs that dirty Time inters.
All things shake into death: we have no hold.
Let us then give ourselves up utterly
to anything we touch, feel, smell and see:
let us be drowned in life and let its tides
make the blood spiral through our porous sides,
dive into sympathy and nature's course
and let life split us into cubes of force,
setting above us as our goal submission
to all the swirling knots of Intuition.

Or shall we say: My mind is not so poor
that thus into a Sea without a shore
I may agree to throw it, intellect
for ever sogged with water till it's wreckt
on some dark snag of Time, while the tosst flesh
coarsens and fattens to a polyp-mesh
of thick sensations bloating out putrescent
across the tides of the continuous present.
No, I'm for intellect which stands above
the petty itch and sweetness of wet love
and lets the senses wither at the tips
to psychologic contact, minus lips.
Give me geometries disdaining mud
that twist at will the pipes of frozen blood
into an organ where the mind plays on
anthems to purify the skeleton.

So far the schism O but you and I
can live with laughter and not need to die!
for our delight accepts both attitudes
and knows well that reality includes
in our experience each quarrelling voice
so that the echoes gorgeously rejoice.

We see reality as consciousness
and yet leave prior place to the pure Forms

with which the mind hacks out all loveliness
and clots to Music all the sensual storms.
Those errors come from the hypothesis
of spiritual force which they conceive
in abstract terminology as though
in formulas of living we could know
Joy's wild electron, or a phrase like this
could find the atomic structure of the Image
when beauty gathers Time against its need
and molecules of warring Music bead.
They make of consciousness a Mist of light,
animal energy diffused above
the intellect; and so are forced to side
either with Time's vast dribbling cataract
or with the barren intellectual pride—
both failing from the true dynamic act
where Form meets Force.
We therefore must retrieve
the symbol *Consciousness* from its vague space
and stuff it concrete as the width of love
narrowing down into a little Kiss:
a gloss of beauty carving out the Face
into a limpid mass thought into sight
and back again to sight with sudden eyes
and into tilted wings of opening skies.

For consciousness is not a dim-lit Orb
wavering round us which we vaguely absorb:
suffusion of the universal power
curbed to our crooked needs for but an hour:
half instinct and half thought yet never clean
one or the other: not the rapid sheen
and the immediate antennæ of the act,
nor reason chipping foursquare at the fact:
merely a store of floating energies
beyond us, which in turn exploits both these:
a nexus made up of our animal past
and the abstract universal mingling thus
in twined sporadic intuitions cast
out of a rhythm personal to us
until the rhythm loses us at last.
Too wandering a definition, this.
Let us get back, concretely, to the Kiss;
for Form remains our symbol. It alone
redeems the spirit from the chaos blown
upon it at each spurt of blood we tease
along the traffic of the arteries.

I said that spirit was a wind: but one
moving with sculptural hands. It leaves behind
cells of quick Imagery stolen from the Sun.
For Form impregnates everywhere this wind
and so the wind in turn curls everything
into the shape which leans towards Desire.
Form as the symbol of the wind I take,

that no dead matrix may deceive our hands
stamping out dyes of death in beauty's name.
Consciousness as far greater than the mind,
and greater than the senses, I proclaim—
but consciousness as Form.
Who understands?

You must be one whose love can never tire.
You must be one who does not fear the wind
but plaited in its manes can ride the Seas
and scoop the foam to crystal ecstasies,
dragging up Venus from eternal death
to sob with kisses underneath her breath
and so ascend to heaven on a shell
patient as your cupped palm: up out of hell.
You must not fear the curls of the mad wind
but stand for ever at its curling core
where in the balance of terrific force,
bending on all sides from the pressure, you
serenely mould the beauty you adore,
knitting the thews that others would divorce,
and passionately prove that this is true:
Consciousness is the Form of your Desire.

Part III

If consciousness is Form, we find
forms, though the merest figment of
the Sun's constructive fantasy,
are consecrated deeply, all.
Taken anew into the mind
and left to burn away in love,
they merge into that energy
or from its centre fall.

Form is the first thing; for we see,
though Form needs life to feed upon,
life in itself could never be
unless it had a shape to don.
Therefore, both ultimate and first,
immediate and yet never known,
glitters the Form, in Time immersed,
yet timeless: wind, yet carving stone.

And Form itself must integrate
not merely forms that left alone
fade into separate barrenness;
but life itself must be made whole
by Form which unifies its fate
and puts a quest of line and tone
sweetly trembling through all stress
to harmonise the soul.

Therefore, in love's naked embrace,
the eventual candour is revealed
since by hot face and hotter face

an infinite compact has been sealed.
The body, Form's dim instrument,
is there drawn closest in the mesh:
not casual touch or sight is meant,
but singleness of active flesh.

All that the touch confirms of sight,
rounding a pattern into heat:
all that the eyes in shreds of silk
offer the straying fingertips:
all in the pool of drowning light
curves, like a wind, from head to feet
and back to where, in maze of milk,
the body opens to the lips.

This is the only unity
that life can give as real Form;
and in the bed of beauty we
must learn to keep all methods warm
whereby we seek a frame to serve
as wire for Venus' lively spine
and concentrate life's subtlest curve
to subtler mass and line.

Part IV

Then let us laugh at the melancholy cry:
Love has no solace for a sculptor's fingers
fumbling at heat while dull light crumples by
on beds where no charmed body palely lingers.

For beauty flushes, they cry, around that slope
sleepy with thighs and crazing with despair,
and then is gone before we even can hope
to hang one quickness on the tasseled air,

one smile to curl upon the trellised gloom,
one pout to burn, one turning of the wrist
to thread with melody the tousled room
and compensate the silence for girls kisst

and gone for ever, slipping down the stair
with finger on the lip and stockinged grace . . .
each, looking sweetly through a shock of hair,
shakes out her gravely disappearing face:

all gone; now nothing but a photograph
to mock those kisses with an idiot mask
behind which bells are tolled and mourners laugh
because the name's forgotten if they ask . . .

or else a garter scented with old moons
and chattering silver of a lilied dawn
when duchesses in long dishevelled swoons
lay raped deliciously on Music's lawn.

We cannot hold the beauty? what is gained
that mouth spurns mouth a moment, wetly red,
and sweetness babbles, tenderness half feigned
and sprawled uncomfortably upon a bed?

What have we gained? they cry . . . whether we take
and sieve this beauty through our open pores
or else refuse our appetites to slake
on Venus rustling to a nest of whores?

Nothing is left, they cry, save an empty sheet
which holds no crease of her compassionate beauty:
nothing is left . . . why then should one repeat
this tedious act like a priapic duty?

But we, we listen to them as they cry,
and we laugh together, for we too despair.
Our flesh is torn to stars, and in the sky:
Music has torn it at our merry dare.

We too despair and yet we do not plead.
Love that has wounded us alone can cure.
We bleed in Music. Therefore let us bleed
in staunchless stars. We laugh and shall endure.

Part V

So love alone can suck the flesh to Form
by shaking every cell to honey tingling
and then, as each nerve glitters into sweetness
and glows together with its nestling brothers,
by running the fibres of a common purpose
suddenly through them, and with one last tug
melting them into plastic immobility.

That pause, that shelving gush of ecstasy,
revealing statues on a barren night
by lightning-flashes where the lightning-curve
becomes the clearing edges of the statue:
this instant of tumultuous harmony
when all our being pours out like a Sun
its unstopped torrent of gyrating flame
and whirling discs of unity, upon
the universe of warmly gaping forms:
this is the gliuter which unrolls all space
because it has reduced space to a point
gushing with discs of Form: this is the moment
from which Time throbs out on a stony world
in piercing arrowheads which strike the flatness
and send it into foam of wreathing life
and seas where Venus gathers in the depths.

This is the tipmost pulse of the embrace.

My hands have carved the faces of the Moon
upon the turgid sky. It was my hand
which aimed the blow and struck upon the rock,
smashing the hole which is the gushing Sun
and drowns the earth in beauty every day,
in gold which all the thirsty soil drinks up
and evilly destroys. Yes, though that hole

spouts down its stream of gold the livelong day,
it cannot send enough down to soak through
the shapes of earth and case them in pure beauty.
Still the trees crackle into grimy boles
and all the scents hang withering on their stalks
and bellies sag. But still the Sun flows on.

My body, used by love, is like the Sun.
Otherwise it is less than all those boughs
drinking light in, to harden it to bark
and crackling crusts of dirt.
I am the Sun,
the open wound that bleeds upon the earth
eternal energy. But he and I
possess another side you have not seen.
Beyond the tunnel of amorphous light
energy shudders into wings of Form
fluttering wilfully through beauty's crystal.
So love which scatters energy abroad,
Demeter with her two hands full of corn
and breasts that infinitely change to birds,
suddenly closes round me into Venus.

Love is the Sun dispensing seeds of light.
Love is the structure burning in the seed.

Out of that sperm of beauty Images
will grow, who take the whole slow curve of Time
(breaking in hills and crags of foam around
the wavy earth) into the simple line
their sides show as they bend to pluck a Kiss.

Poetry must be born, then, of this sperm
of love, or it is nothing—it is bark
snapt from the wooden limbs of creaking light,
a rigid evil, not humanity.

Our trees must all be women shockt to leaves,
a Daphne split to elemental love
or Syrinx grooved with sorrow till she take
Music for pith and whisper by the waters.

Still more then if our trees must all be spirits
leafing from human bodies into nature,
our loves must all be human and their rhythm
be that of light sucked trembling into bodies
to flare across embraces into Form—
into the lightning-flash of circling Form
returning through the Orb of pouring gold
from this poor side where forms are crazed by light
into the other side where quiet light
is ribbed with surfing forms.
The flesh is love's,
if love can take it; and, without it, love
must pine and dry till it is crackling wood.

Then if the flesh is love's, and love's the power
to make it both the seminal desire

and that which is desired, all poetry
must be the colour of the flesh's prism
shining within the structure of pure beauty,
and he is the best poet who can most
irradiate the sharpest clarity
with hottest luxury from sensual cells.

This is a hard task conquering disgust;
for it is easy climbing on the hills
to dream of structures picked quite clean by birds
and swung into a net of arctic mind.
The heat of flesh has passed into thin brilliance
and we will write of psychologic tin
jingling in brittle contacts and of God
spread in a thin pure light across the tin.

Then all the heady cells of honeyed flesh
appal us like a graveyard where the dead
rot into passionate turmoil of fat worms
and heaving lustrous pullulating patches:
the phosphorescence where our body chafes
against the salty edges of the air.

Which is it then? There's tin or phosphorescence.
Which will you have? I will have neither, I.
For both these equally evade my symbol
of consciousness and love. Both come from fear
of all that love can mean. One bares its breast
to all the carrion-crows of intellect
until it is a nervy skeleton,
then hides from love behind thin hands of thought
seeking an artificial harmony
and always failing somewhere, thrust awry
in psychological strangeness and obliqueness
where hands thin out into a tinny God.
The other, fearing love too, bores in flesh
like a mad mole, in hopes that in the slush
it may, at last, darken to ecstasy
beyond returning, scattered in a pit
of the hot belly bubbling like a drum.

Neither is our way. To the flesh we turn,
scraping away the jungle-damp with lanterns
and knowing that never, while we follow truly
delighted rhythms of our self-knowledge, may
the darkness rust upon us with its heat.
Neither is our way. To the intellect
we turn that we may view ourselves beyond
the acts that mesh us like the deepening chords
which burn about the cresting melody.
This is the structure of our ecstasy,
turning all angles into human gestures,
and seeing metaphysical dichotomies
as human spirits striving into will.

But it is needed that some poets fail
because their failure gives us a new track

to drive across the forest into beauty.
Now from the womb of hot unconsciousness
and from the tinny parabolic contacts
we film out new caresses for our love
with trysts in bleakly unfamiliar places.
They make new trysts for love, if love has courage
to dare the croaking marsh and dare the angles
striking at life with ineffectual blades.

Now we must conquer Time with conscious Music
and flagellate the primitive with sweetness.
In our own minds all uglinesses dwell
and all the dwindling skeletons of fear
and all its quags of mud. So we must face them
and quite transform them lyric into love.

Again she comes, but this time in a breadth
of soft mercurial light outcolouring
the former litter of her love. Again
she comes, and we must catch her in a net
more richly woven from the hemp of light
or she'll evaporate through broken senses
like her own pearl inside the vinegar
of our soured energy. We now must cast
wider the net, as well as make it richer,
drawing a catch of huddled images
as sparkling as a herring-catch at dawn.
The senses now must mingle like the light
of gems reflecting one another thickly
and then all burning in the tossing water.

This is the task before the poet now,
while at the same time seeking the huge rhythm
which sends life hurdling at the gap of death
to snatch a tuft of stars beyond its reach:
all this, the images so brightly touched
that if they tell us in a single stanza
merely how a young girl bent at a Kiss,
we know the way her hands moved daintily,
plucking at beauty, for the next twelve hours,
each second of her idling; and much more.
This is the concentration that we need.
It sends Times skurrying with its cuff of beauty,
the unity which branches in the Image;
and this delight, I say, is conscious Music.

Then let her come; for we are ready for her!
The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
burned on the water, and the glittering foam
hissed round it like the sparks of that great torch;
and all the flickering tassels of the Sun,
the tangled threads of light, the bannered world,
all the tosst shreds of colour everywhere,
were part of that blown fire whose sweetest gold
paled inwards till it reached the quiet core
where Cleopatra's face mused on her hands
and set the day alight.

MOONSTRUCK

by PHILIP LINDSAY

"HAVE I no hope—no hope at all?"

His lugubrious eyes were turned up, praying, to her, as she stood, two steps above him, leaning against the wall, one hand on hip, the other snugly fondling the white curve of her own throat. As she stared down on him, he looked infinitely pathetic, infinitely idiotic: his long face, the pain-wrenched mouth, a lopsided crescent, and the thick, soft kind of nose, bulbous at the tip like a champagne cork. His eyes seemed all white between their red lids, excepting for the lune of the blue-haloed black eyeball netted in long heavy lashes. It sickened her, that white, as would the glimpse of an unhealed wound; but there was no feeling of compassion within her, only a vague irritation, a nasty growing desire to hurt.

"Oh, please, Dick . . ." She frowned at her neat arrow-pointed shoe and shook her brown head petulantly. "Must we re-act the whole silly melodrama again? I have said No twice already."

"Three poison stabs: three bloody wounds——"

"Don't start swearing at me now. I will not stand it."

Hopelessly he looked away. His deep sigh stayed, caught for a moment on the hidden perches of the air. He did so love her: she was so beautiful.

"I'd—I'd like to murder you," he said tonelessly, unconvincingly, sincerely. How he hated and loved her because of her tantalisingly aloof beauty. Torturing ambivalence. "I don't know why—you are despicable——"

"Thank you." She yawned. Let him talk on and make as many ugly faces as he pleased. He didn't mean a word of it: and even if he did, it was nothing to do with her.

"——despicable and ignorant—a cretin——" Oh, where was the old vitriolic sarcasm of his tongue? What demon had wrenched it from his mind, that delicious, flattering power to hurt, and slipped these inane truisms in its place? "——ignorant——"

"You'd better tell mother that." Somehow she wanted to laugh; she felt the cruel notes washing in her chest, strangling her throat. But they did not come. Instead, she smiled at him. One tiny tooth was missing at the back, and when she smiled the minute black cavity whispered all the secret lascivious bubblings of her heart, enticed and mocked, captivated and repelled.

It maddened Dick. The cancer of jealousy was boring into his painfully empty bowels. "Cynthia," he mumbled, "old Propertius was right after all. *Dura timebam, hac tamen excepta, Cynthia, perfidia.*"

"I might tell you," she snapped, "that those foreign words do not impress me in the least." It was taking an unfair advantage of her, talking like that. Why, he might even have been swearing at her!

"Who is this other chap?" He set his mouth firmly into

as straight a line as possible, but the lower lip trembled a little. However hard he might tighten the muscles over his sloping jawbones or narrow the eyes, the old weak Dick remorselessly begged through the vapid Strong Man mask.

"You don't know him."

"And I don't want to. What is he? A bank clerk?"

"I don't see why it should interest you."

"It does." The mask crinkled up, washed away like yesterday's cosmetics, the eternal doggy-face miserably beseeched her, the voice became sibilant, escaping air hissing from the released bellows of his lungs. "Oh, Cynthia, I love you, oh, I love you. So much that it hurts. If you could only understand. But you couldn't possibly. You're a woman, a girl. If you were dead and no man could ever kiss you . . . only worms. . . . Love's a beastly thing."

"I can do nothing." No, really, she could do nothing. She was not in love with him. She was not in love with anybody. Suddenly she realised it . . . not in love with anybody!

"Give me a chance. Try me out. Let me at least be with you." The bellows were empty, sucked dry; the words floated distantly to silence.

Perhaps some day she might fall in love: suddenly, gloriously, be swept off her high-heeled feet in a rushing torrent of desire. He must be very strong and handsome, and his kisses would burn the heart out of her like live coals on the lips, and his brown eyes corkscrew holes of lust into her mind. They would live at Rose Bay (married now, of course) in a lovely big white house, a miniature castle, with uncountable hordes of servants, and mosaic bathrooms with sunken-in baths: the kind that one saw only in advertisements. And she would have thousands of society visitors, her famous days at homes, in the meticulously careless boudoir with the Indian rugs and Batik silks and a tiger-skin. But men were all so very ridiculous. Even Jimmie . . . although he *was* nice. But she couldn't imagine herself married to him; somehow she did not desire him so awfully, not in that insatiable, eternal way that love must come, the way that they all pretended to want her. But *were* they only pretending? Did they really and truly hunger for her so very greatly, like dogs with lolling tongues before a biscuit, all gaping and wanting and hoping? Was she so terrifically desirable as poets made girls out to be?

"——you were dressed in green. Your hair had slipped down at the front and hung over your blue eyes. They were laughing at me. I talked about Freud and Croce because I was drunk. I remember you perfectly, horribly clearly. I will never forget you, damn it all, never, never——"

What was he saying? Never? Why was he talking about Never? Would she never meet this swarthy, black-haired lover of hers, dressed so immaculately, with a gold wristlet-watch and long amber cigarette-holder? With his carefully modulated voice that quavered a top note now and then when he was talking passionately to her? Was he only a passing ghost, a wandering shadow stolen from her dreams to be with her always, even in the light?

"——because I've got no money? You are cruel. If I'd a motor-car now, like Jimmie Wimble, and was able to take you out to dances and buy you chocolates and things—it'd be different, wouldn't it? It'd be all right, eh? It isn't fair."

What rubbish he was talking! Money had nothing whatever to do with love. As if *that* mattered! Certainly, if he were to trouble to dress a little better and could afford to give her a good time, she might allow him to take her out occasionally for the reward of kisses. But that wasn't *love!* She did that with lots of boys: Jack, Reggie, Peter, Cyril. . . . All that she wanted was to enjoy herself. Perhaps it was selfish of her, but then, why should she bore herself with Dick all for nothing? Life was not so very long, and she was nearly twenty now: soon she would have to settle down and get married. Mother was always telling her that she would, and mother knew, of course.

"It's no good, Dick, no good at all. I don't love you, and I never could. I like you, you are nice, but nothing more than that. I'm sorry if I've hurt you. . . . We can still be friends."

"I don't want to be friends. That would be hell. If I can't have you I don't want to ever see you again. I hate you: you are horrible. Oh, God, couldn't you learn to love me? Couldn't you try?"

She measured him with dull blue eyes. Unsmiling, her round white face seemed frozen into the strain of mechanical thought. With an effort she recalled the sound of his voice from the floating storehouse of the air, lapping back each word to her.

"It's useless, Dick. Don't you realise that I could never love you? It is rather impertinent, I think, this forcing of yourself upon me when you know perfectly well that I don't want you."

"I'm sorry." What was wrong with him to-night? He was a coward. There was only one dignified thing to do. To laugh easily, call a mocking good-bye, and clatter merrily, like some powerful centaur, down these jagged stairs. But he couldn't. The very thought of going, of leaving her dear presence, palsied every nerve in his body, clamped his heart with cold hands. It would be unthinkable.

"It's late," said Cynthia suddenly. "I had better go."

"Whom have you got to see to-night?" He caught her roughly.

"Let me go . . . please, Dick, let me go." She had the advantage of indifference. He was weak and shivering with jealous rage. "I have only to see mother, if you really wish to know. Now, let me past."

She pushed him aside and ran lightly up the half-dozen or so steps that led to the floor above, to her flat. He saw the plump curve of her back through the striped silk dress, and her legs, grey-armoured silk.

She was gone. Without one backward look, she was gone. Dick felt painfully empty; his body was a dry cocoon. His bowels, it seemed, had writhed up to his chest, oozed into his gullet, suffocating him. He was sick, in that drunken state

when the stomach sends its first warnings of the coming insurrection. Something must be done, something, this was so unfair.

His nerves were tautened, his head ached, throbbing. Up and down, up and down, he strode the street, staring at Cynthia's yellow glaring window, waiting for this unknown other lover to come. He was alone, despairingly alone, an outcast, a leper. Lovers passed, laughing, arms around each other's waists, locked happily, heads on shoulders. Occasionally burly policemen came to stare him out of countenance into a guilty shuffle. Trams seesawed, bobbing, roaring by, strange monsters stuffed with their meals of undigested straight-backed corpses. Purring motor-cars padded along, like giant cats, their wide round eyes boring into the sheet of darkness. Still, Cynthia's window preserved its unblinking curtain of crushed light. No lover came, no white ghost of Cynthia slipped through the black maw of those open doors to some unholy assignation. What was going on behind that emotionless window? Was he already there, this unknown mysterious He? Talking to her, kissing her, perhaps—God, no, no, no—impossible. Was she there alone or with her mother? She might be lying lonely in her cosy bed, reading some book of his that he had been fool enough to lend her; or undressing; or making a cup of tea; or having a bath. The mental picture of her splashing water, a white naiad, in a rectangular enamelled pool, fixed itself agonizingly before his longing eyes. The shower spluttered down, pearl-coloured streamers flying before an electric fan, icicles hammering on her centipede backbone. She slapped her glistening thighs, held up her two sleek gleaming arms to rub the froth of sweetly smelling soap well into her head: the pretty little breasts pulled by the action, raised their nipples in a pout of expected kisses, *his* kisses—only he knew the kiss that would fit the subtle pleasure of their beauty. He saw the lozenges of short brown curling hair under the armpits, he felt them with mental fingers, wet and rustling after the satin cushion of her head. Briskly the towel sopped her dry, reddening the pink flesh with warm healthy blood. She was standing naked on the mat . . . naked, smiling. . . .

Morning brought no relief to tired eyes. Dick fell asleep to the dancing shadows of naked girls shimmering through yellow lifeless windows, and awoke to find that they had not moved, had stayed placidly there all through the night, silhouetted devils. There was only one thought in his mind: to see Cynthia again, see Cynthia again. He tried to bleed his melancholia on to paper, but found he could not: words were brittle and broke to fragments in his brain. For ever and ever now he was scarred, a man apart from life, a lonely Dante with pain and grief stamped eternally upon his forehead, on the long jaw. Even though he too might some day find desire in the limbs of a Gemma Donati, it would be only because Beatrice-Cynthia moved there, stayed ever at his side to prick the bladder of love with sharp memories, so that it burst with tears and drowned all hopes. She would be always smiling behind the lashes of his eyes, dimming the beauty of other girls. In time she would

repent, when she was old, hearing men talk of the great poet Richard Tweedie, whose work was stamped with such poignant suffering because once an unthinking jill-flirt scorched his heart to ashes. Yes, she'd be sorry then. With the determination of making her sorry as soon as possible, he set down to construct another, more powerful *Vita Nuova*, but found he was unable to link two words together. But as the day wore on he was appalled to discover that the memory of Cynthia was beginning to fade a trifle and it needed a strong effort of will to draw all the particles of her into one complete whole, a dim wraith of her beauty, a kind of tarnished astral body, her psyche. Even then she *would* muddle herself with other girls he had known. Here was Eileen's mouth, Marjorie's nose and Cynthia's hair, and when he did manage to add her eyes it was only to discover that Lettice had stolen the wig. It was distressing, but a minor matter; his soul was still on the grid-iron of thwarted lust, even though his mind might be a little vague about the fire beneath.

This did not deter him, however, from the indignity of waiting for her outside her office in Hunter Street. She was stenographer for a business man of some shady description.

"Cynthia," he called as the lift tossed her towards him. "Cynthia!" a woeful Endymion baying for the moon.

"You're here again?" She tapped her snakeskin foot impatiently on the pavement and shook her round basin-hatted head and bit at her lower lip. "What is it you want now?"

"You. Only you . . . always you." How could he have forgotten that chubby little face, those soft blue eyes, that husky voice, rich like old brandy—or was it pea soup?

"This is impossible." She stepped daintily from the safety of the footpath into the rumbling cyclone of traffic. "But you may see me over to the tram, if you wish," she added kindly.

"Oh, please come and have some coffee." The tram stop was just across the street.

"I haven't time." Petulantly she paused in the gutter. "Are you going to see me across the road or not?" she asked.

Argument, he realised, was useless before the hard coldness of those calculating blue eyes, the smiling contempt of the red lips. Dick sighed and took her soft warm arm in his.

"You are going out to-night?" he asked sorrowfully.

"Yes . . . with mother."

"I only wish I could believe you," he bellowed above the noise of traffic and other people's conversation.

Her heavy voice dawdled emotionlessly through the suave clattering of a motor lorry and the jangling passage of an overfilled tram. "No one is asking you to," she said.

"Cynthia, please, Cynthia." He ducked ignominiously aside from an excitable cyclist. "Cynthia, where were you last night?"

"Home, of course." She was surprised.

"I mean, whom were you with?"

"Why, you—who do you think?"

"I mean afterwards." They mingled and were drowned in the bright puddle of people waiting for the procession of trams

that came pompously, slowly towards them, to be each in turn swamped by the flux of chattering crowds.

"Why, I was with mother."

"Truly, truly now, Cynthia, did you see a boy at all?" He looked away. Somehow he did not like to meet her contemptuously cold eyes.

"I did not. But you have no right to question me like this. What is it to do with you if I had to meet fifty boys?" She felt angry, and at the same time a sort of exultation in her power. He was sincere . . . now she knew that. He adored her, poor lad, adored her awfully.

"Here's my tram. . . ."

A moment since she had stood beautifully beside him, and now she was gone. Had she really been there? Had that been her rich voice that had spoken to him, that warm body hers that had touched him, brushed against his arm? He looked around at all these other girls: so many of them, millions of them, all happy and talking and laughing. It was depressing. And some were even lovelier than Cynthia, lovelier than any he had ever had, or could ever possibly hope to have. What were they thinking of? Did they think, or were they simply automatons stepped from lovely paintings, Rubens' heroines come to life, some of Etty's lewd little wenches run wild out of curtained canvas? Had any of them noticed him? He looked so sad, so pitiable, he knew; so obviously stamped with the white-hot branding-iron of luckless love, a Balzac hero, Raphael Valentin coughing blood on the microscopic *peau de chagrin*, or even perhaps Balzac himself, crying that he would never find his ideal of glorious beauty and abundant wealth. Surely these girls would recognise his blighted genius? A dying poet grappling with the demon phthisis or his tardy muse, romantically pasty-faced. Keats dreaming of Fanny. A lean and swarthy poet of despair. Couldn't they see the difference between him and all these other immaculate, brainless male animals fussing about them? Was he not a man apart, beyond the world's vulgarities and its sorrows? Yet he was passed unnoticed, a fly-speck, one bubble in the sewer of life. But one day he would show them . . . some day . . . when his poems were published . . . it would be vastly different.

He had dinner. He went to the cinematograph. He went home to bed.

Boring rodomontade of existence. The sun still blazed in the morning, and fell through his open window in a bright mosaic on the coloured carpet, plastering the walls with a cheerful amber sheen. There was no change. The washing-stand was still as bleakly respectable in its corner; the dressing-table was still as untidy as himself; his wardrobe was still an impregnable donjon; the bed as warm and insidiously cosy as ever. He lay and groaned. Above, the ventilating centre-piece, with its drooping chandelier like a mouldy bunch of white grapes, still threatened to drop down and crush him, as though some fantastic juggler cooking at the fire had once flung a huge pancake at the roof, and it had congealed there. Some night, God perhaps would creep in and scrape it off when

He grew hungry. And—damn it! There was the dressing bell. Oh, these clockwork boarding-houses!

The water was only lukewarm in his bath, and he shivered beneath the cataclysm of the shower, shivered, and froze to a crouching statue of whimpering terror and pain, struggling to recover his breath, mysteriously gone. He shaved, cutting himself in two distinct places. Why was he always forgetting to buy new razor-blades? Was it a Freudian complex? Wretchedly he scraped away the foaming beard, splashing it on to the crinkly paper in great blobs like phlegm, phthisical, blood-stained phlegm. Then he smothered his white body in warm caressing clothes, cleaned his tan shoes, and strolled to breakfast.

Mr. Buzzacott's bald head rolled like a huge egg from behind the morning paper. "Ah, good morning, Tweedie." He nodded to Dick, and the smooth shining head rolled from sight again.

Nobody else at their table had yet collected enough energy to rise from bed. The whole long room was decorated with newspapers like giant white moths. They were bastions against conversation, armour that snuggled each irritable body away from other irritable bodies. And it was for these creatures then that Dick worked? It was for these slugs that he wasted his highly valuable youth chasing news? He felt very much disgusted with himself.

He would never see Cynthia again. Never. Never. Never again. All the day he swore that terrible ultimatum over and over again in his mind, swore it as he interviewed the Lord Mayor on the matter of the offensive smell of the sewerage at Bondhi; as he joked with bull-necked policemen, exchanging smutty jokes with them, while they explained with great gusto how they had caught the mysterious gentleman in somebody's backyard; swore it as he sat hunched over his desk cramping the disastrous burglary into black type. Why should he worry? Dreams were far more satisfactory in the long run than reality, and he was lost building joyous brothels in the air. No man could ever have Cynthia in life, unless, of course, he married her. Dick was tolerably sure of that, but he himself at least had her lovely wraith with him at night. When she lay sleeping, her white soft body tangled in chaste bedclothes, her ghost stole from that breathing body, esoteric lecherous ghost, who stayed hidden all the day to come laughing to him at dark. A siren slipped from the sky who stayed perched outside his window until he had switched out the light, laid his book aside, and stretched beneath the sheets, swooned into night's cool cellars. Then she would flutter in: Cynthia's face, her eyes, her lips, sometimes her voice, her imagined breasts and belly and back. She was his completely then, his until brutal daylight crawled under his eyelids and startled her dear soul. One kiss, one long-drawn sucking kiss, unhoped-for ecstasy. And he was awake, blurred memories in his mind. He heard the servants in the hall, the pattering of feet, the swishing of their skirts, rustling of quick brooms, and he damned them heartily. Their proximity reminded him. He was out of bed and at the washing-stand. . . .

The telephone opposite his desk, the office telephone, held open its wide mouth invitingly, an Ethiopian flower. Through that network cavern, that tiny hole, Cynthia's voice could whisper its strong dawdling notes. It could . . . it did.

"Who's speaking?" From miles away, throbbing over a twisted wire, pulsing through the bustling city, her quiet voice flowed into his ear and thumped his heart.

"Dick," he called. "Dick Tweedie. Cynthia . . . Cynthia. Are you there, Cynthia? Damn it all, are you *there*? Are—you—THERE?"

No answer. She had gone. She had not spoken to him. Buzzz-buzzzzzzzz, went the 'phone. "What number, please?" demanded a boredly inquisitive feminine voice. He jabbed the receiver home. She had not spoken to him. Oh, God, what could he do! The dear lovable ghost was dead within the husk of the cruel living Cynthia, rotted like the cankerous kernel of a nut.

He could not keep away. At five o'clock he was drawn inevitably to Hunter Street to wait futilely outside her building, anxious for her contemptuous anger.

She stood perfectly still when she saw him approaching obsequiously, hat in hand. She sucked in her plump red lips, and frowned on him, and stamped her foot.

"Dick, what do you mean by this?" she demanded. Her voice was cold and hard now, no hint of beauty in its deep flavour.

"Love. That's all I mean. Adoration. Passion."

"I never want to see you again." She was genuinely angry this time. "And that is final."

"No hope at all for me, Cynthia?"

"Not the least hope. I am even beginning to dislike you."

"Have you another chap?" He beseeched his death wound. "Tell me, Cynthia, have you another boy?"

"If you really do wish to know," she replied, "Jimmie Wimble is taking me out to the theatre to-night."

"Jimmie?" He had always considered Jimmie his friend; he had introduced her to him. "Jimmie!"

"Now, will you please leave me alone?"

He let her go. It was hopeless now, he knew. True daughter of the moon; pure, healthy Artemis; she was no man's, no man's; she had no emotion, no compassion even in her. He was nothing to her, for she had not even attempted to lie to him this time, not even attempted to lie. Virgin Daughter of the Moon, it was unfair, such girls should be strangled at birth . . . but Artemis was always cold, a blob of icing-sugar in the pale sky.

Dick was in love again. He was also drunk, but that was only incidental. He had been discussing with Peter the possible use of glazes in painting nowadays, and Lesbianism; and was, with his mind roasting over the slow-fire of the whisky in his belly, thoroughly enjoying himself. Around him were dancers, all types of dancers, girls packed like sardines in tins of oily music, girls wriggling in the slopped music; ankles and earrings;

all young girls, or most of them. He loved the whole roomful of people, and his intoxicated friends. He felt that all eyes were fixed admiringly, deferentially, upon him; especially the girls'. He had no reasons whatever for thinking so, except that he was talking rather loudly, in a bellow subdued by the saxophone. But he was drunk; and so the babble of squelched light and pendulous balloons, the stiff revolving screens of imitative corpses, were but minor properties in a play staged by himself, a fantasy that he could banish by one snap of the fingers.

It was an art students' dance, one of those affairs that appear pleasant enough when viewed through the bottom of a tumbler; refraction of glass wet with drunkenness; but are suicidally dull when one is sober. Dick brushed his damp hand back through his over-long hair (it was an exhaustingly hot night) and nodded his head in a sprightly fashion, tapping one foot upon the floor and swaying dangerously. A careless couple came close to him, and he swung his pliant body into an arc to escape being thrown headlong. He glanced round at them. The youth seemed to be fast asleep on the girl's shoulder, but in reality was whispering with all the passion possible while being jolted, "You are more beautiful than the stars, than the moon, than Nita Naldi, than the . . . damn it all, the—the world." While the girl boredly blew cigarette smoke into his earnest face, smiling disinterest, and kept on repeating, "I wonder what time it is, kid?" and looking round the room in search of the clock that wasn't there. Dick swung round just in time to meet her eyes. Then it was that he fell in love again.

It was only a glimpse. A red-headed Pierrette blazed before him for a second, and the girl was gone. Her eyes were round black marbles; her eyebrows thick semicircles; her little nose was freckled and turned up at the tip; she had the black frizzled hair of a negress. He cricked his neck searching for her, but she had vanished like a burst bubble, jewels dropped into a drain. Suddenly he felt emetically lonely. "I smell drink," he said significantly, and strolled away in the middle of a splendid epigram on girls and the disintegration of the atom, that Peter had been trying to work in for some time.

But he smelt no drink; there was nothing whatever to smell beyond sweat, halitosis and stale perfume. A chair invited him, and he sat limply on its cold wood and stared at the crowd. She was not to be seen, she was not anywhere; some puff of laughter had wafted her away, a bubble of pink fire; she had slipped down some crack of secret delight, and was gone for ever out of this kinematic world of mercurial precision. Then suddenly the blur of a pink dress, a squirming mass of black hair, a tired whisper, "What's the time, kid?" and she was moving before him.

"Nine o'clock," he guessed politely.

She thanked him with a forced smile that sent a shiver up his inebriated backbone. He stretched his neck, his eyes blankly, adoringly wide. And she was gone. But not lost. With the aloof air of one out for a quiet stroll, he sauntered through the dancers, who pushed and bumped with soft buttocks and sharp

elbows all about him. He did not see, he did not hear; he followed only a pink dress that swayed and twinkled like some strange cloud (or was it a fat nude cupid?) before his eyes. It was drowned, burst out again, crumpled up, burst out again, then swayed and paused. She was talking to some friends. One was Harold, and Dick knew Harold.

The whole room was silent as though in reverence for this sacred end of searching. The turbulent band had stopped, dancers were regaining breath, girls were giggling and protesting. Still airily unconscious, with bored concentration, Dick attained his object. He stalked past, hoping that Harold might notice him, which he didn't. At the other end of the room he turned again, and unhurriedly continued his promenade.

This time he left nothing to chance. He knocked Harold in the small of the back.

"Damn," gasped Harold, and then, "Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Oh, hullo, Harold!" he cried with consummate surprise. "Who would have thought of meeting you here."

"As I go to this art school," growled Harold, "I think it natural enough that I should be here."

"Quite so, quite so, of course." He tweaked his eyebrows towards the pink dress.

"It is more reasonable," continued Harold, ignoring the silent request, "to ask how *you* come to be here. A *journalist!*" he added with the utmost loathing and contempt.

"I come," said Dick grandly. "I just *come*," and he rolled the cigarette arrogantly in his mouth.

"Without being asked," concluded Harold, and would have turned away again had not Dick caught his arm.

"Do you want a drink?" asked Dick, and winked.

"No, I don't. Got some of my own."

"Would the girls like a drink?"

"They would not," said Harold coldly.

"How do you know? Would you like a drop of whisky?" he asked the pink dress.

She turned, and he leered into her black eyes, black by electric light, but they might have been any colour by day. She ran her tiny tongue around her lips ruminatively, as though she were thinking very deeply.

"I don't drink," she said in a voice that was huskily unoiled, that was pointed, and dug into him like a knife.

"I'm sorry for you." He smiled. "But you dance?"

"Sometimes." And she laughed, a soft laugh, which like a boomerang swept the air and returned to her own hot stomach. "I'm very particular," she said.

"Good." The band rumbled and squeaked the opening of a fox-trot. "Come on!" He caught her waist, and soon they were part of the teetotum of other dancers around them, turning in an endless, writhing circle, in and out; always a circle, rather ragged and torn on its circumference. Embracing planets slapped together by some mad gravitational tug of desire and revolving round the hanging heart of the music. Relativity in jazz; do we curve, dearest? Einstein in the foxtrot; does

the pull of the music distort our kiss, the bend of your backbone under my fingers. Oh, here we are again.

"You're lovely," whispered Dick. "I adore you."

She giggled. "Do you know that you're the tenth boy to tell me that to-night?" she said.

"But the first to mean it." He rubbed his burning face up and down her curly black hair that tickled him like feathers, and was yet as soft and as pleasant as velvet.

She blew cigarette smoke into his blue eyes. "Cut it out, kid," she said. "Do you think I was born yesterday?"

"I wouldn't be at all surprised. Aren't goddesses born at a moment's notice, fully grown? Didn't Athena spring from Jove's ear completely coated with snail-like armour? Aw, hell, to see you suddenly like this. . . . God, I didn't know anybody so beautiful was alive since Gaby Deslys died."

"Ain't you the cat's whiskers now!" she said.

"You are lovely. Where the blazes have you been hiding all this time? How was it that I haven't seen you before? To think that I have been living, no, moulting, and you were living at the same time, and I never guessed! It seems all wrong."

"What's your name, kid?" she asked.

"Dick," he said, "Dick Tweedie. And you——?"

"Madge," she giggled. "They call me Bubs," she added. "I don't know why."

"Ooo, Bubs. . . ." He breathed sentimental whisky on her, and then began munching her soft white neck.

With a quick upward butt of her knee she shunted his clumsy body further from her, less embarrassingly close. "Cut that out now, kid," she warned, and giggled and frowned.

"Oooo, how I love you," he moaned.

Then he saw Cynthia.

She smiled at him out of the clutching embrace of some fellow in evening dress. It was a contemptuous smile, an I Told You So, sneering smile, that made Dick's earnest face burn as from a sudden blast of heat. He straightened the languishing curvature in his spine.

Bubs turned her head with his and saw that smile of Cynthia's. So he was her boy, this Dick, and now he was sorry that he had left her. She felt a new jealous resentment within her, and stared coldly, thoughtfully back into Cynthia's blue eyes that wandered from Dick to her. The sneering smile merged to one of distant superiority. It was a challenge.

"Who's that girl?" asked Bubs.

"Which girl?" asked Dick with fumbled surprise.

"The one you were staring at, of course . . . dressed as an apache or a boy or something. The baby-looking one. . . ."

"I don't know her." He felt sick. Cynthia had seen him, she knew, she was laughing at him; he had played the fool once too often. Instinctively the old mask of frost-bitten lover wrenched his pale features. He looked very ill.

Bubs was angry. It was an insult to her—slighting her grownupness, to compare her with that schoolgirl-looking doll over there. She stared straight at Dick with eyes so intent that

he felt himself ignominiously blushing. With set jawbones, however, and rigid neck, he returned the scrutiny; and then suddenly relieved, as though a prop which had been holding up his neck had snapped, he buried his burning face amongst her hair, against the smooth cheek, firm and soft, up and down, against the heavy hair, cropped short, thick as a tea-cosy, and all curly like millions of twining snakes, wire snakes, a beautiful Medusa.

The band was frenzied, clattering and banging. Everywhere, like the scampering of mice, feet swished the floor, as though a thousand stiff brooms were sweeping it. Laughter was on all sides. Eyes were smiling all around them, as though they were circled in a chromatic setting of rich jewels.

"What about a drop of the rye?" asked Bubs with sudden inspiration.

"The what?"

"The drink, the whisky." She laughed up into his puzzled face, her lips drawn back tightly over from the white teeth, showing a ridge of gums like bloodied stalactites. "Come on. . . ."

"I thought you didn't drink," he said. Cynthia's superior smile, her blue jeering eyes. They turned his heart inside-out. She had ruined his whole evening. Why had she made him remember her and all the pain her face must bring, his unwritten, immortal *Vita Nuova?*

But Bubs drew him through the whorl of dancers, drew him after her as a small child drags a toy boat. He was numbed, his head bowed as one deeply shamed—and Cynthia's blue eyes scorned him for his lying, despised him for his forgetfulness.

Even into the darkness she pursued him. Like a tiny butterfly, her blue eyes sailed through the air and burned on blackness. They watched and scoffed derisively.

"Sit down," Bubs whispered at the top floor. Other couples were already there, heaps of gloom thrown about like discarded dustbins, bundles of old washing. "Come on, kid, out with the drink."

He produced it lugubriously and passed it to her, hearing her gurgling and sucking at the neck. And she said that she didn't drink! It was straight whisky, too! He had not sullied its purity with one drop of water.

She returned it, breathing like a vacuum-cleaner to cool the freezing heat in her throat. "Hot stuff, kid," she said.

He nodded, and they sat very still, side by side, in the darkness, leaning against the wall, neither speaking. Beneath them they could hear the insistent shrieks of laughter, the monotonous clattering of feet, the blatant howling of the band. Up through the well of staircase the light beat as it would above the rim of hell, zigzagging with the cries of the damned, flaring yellowly and then slowly fading like smoke, up to the black roof, hidden in clouds of night. They could hear people talking on the floor below.

Dick sighed. But otherwise it seemed that the curling black snakes of Bubs' hair were alive and had charmed him to insensible stone; strange, new, beautiful Medusa. She stared

up into his unconscious face, smiling herself with that forced smile that displayed all her red gums. One hand of hers resting on his knee burned into the flesh as though it were some glove of sodden heat. But he did not see . . . only the glow-worm eyes of Cynthia despised him utterly. She so pure and lovely, and he so base.

Bubs' heavy head drooped like a frail coal-black zinnia, weighted with its mesh of petals, and slid down to Dick's lap, and lay there, sighing. He put his hand instinctively upon her back, patting it. It was a hot night, and the sweat had come through the flimsy cloth so that it was damp and very warm It seemed to scald his palm, but he let it stay. She moved her head and giggled, her hand holding his thigh tightly as a kind of lever to stop herself from slipping from him.

Cynthia's eyes burned with sardonic vituperation.

"Oh, God, God," he moaned. He hardly remembered Bubs. He was dreaming of Cynthia . . . she had murdered life for him, poor sacrilegious mortal daring to touch the cold lips of Olympos's most Virginal Goddess, strong-thighed purity, the Moon. . . .

"Dear," whispered Bubs, and raised her face to meet his kiss through the steam of darkness.

He saw her round eyes beneath him glowing benignly. She held herself up on one arm, the hand resting on and crushing into Dick's thigh with a strange jumble of pleasure and ecstatic pain. He bent down and caught her and kissed her. She giggled and nestled up next to him; her soft flamed cheek baked on his, her sweet breath seared his skin. He fumbled with her wet body, naïad rising from the black waters beneath, his hand slipped under her arm to hold her, the thumb poking up into the armpit. As if the cloth had melted with the perspiration, he could feel each separate thread of the crisp hair. They seemed to be simmering, stewing in some pot of blackness, a witch's cauldron. Air seethed into their nostrils, patted their ear-drums, twisted their thirsty mouths. Her eyes were savage bonfires, yet tender. They basked and sweltered together in the heat, abandoned to its exquisite prickling exhaustion. He felt her small body become suddenly limp in his arms as though the spine had boiled to gelatine and all the bones to paste. They slipped down further. Ah, she was alive, a sinewy snake in his arms. Her lips were wet fire on his, her eyes were two black pots of stewing desire. Their breath came quickly, noisily, like singing kettles.

"Oh, no, it's too dark up there," was Cynthia's voice. "Oh, Jimmie, let's dance."

"Only for a minute," said Jimmie masterfully. "Come on now."

"Only a minute," she mocked. "Remember, only a minute."

Dick heard them coming up the stairs, heard her laughter and her kisses, heard them moving round like dogs before they sat, heard the plomp of her soft heavy body on the floor. Heard their talk, then heard their actions, and all the while Bubs was twisting like a pinned butterfly in his arms, flapping and sighing and moaning under his kisses. He heard Cynthia behaving

in exactly the same way, exactly, identically the same way . . . so she was just like Bubs really, this Virginal Daughter of the Moon? Just like Bubs to other fellows. But he was barred. Why? Why? "Oooo, Gord, kid—oh, ooh, la, oooer!" murmured Bubs. And Cynthia was sobbing nearly the same to Jimmie's kisses. Suddenly the kettle boiled over. . . . Dick was crying . . . crying. . . . Bubs did not notice. She began to lick away the tears as though she were some ecstatically playful spaniel. Her rough tongue sponged his hot cheeks, leaving them wetter than ever. She nibbled and sucked like a baby at a breast. Then she was gasping quiet; that warm caterpillar, her tongue, drooped away, bloated with feeding. They simmered in uncomfortable languor, their humid bodies melting to one tumbled heap of impersonal flesh. . . . Still, Dick sobbed.

He heard Cynthia hoarsely requesting a cigarette.

"For Gord's sake, kid, give me a fag," said Bubs.

JAZZ

THE Tom-tom beats on the Listening wire;
The Banjo twankles its tune;
The Cymbals strike with barbaric clash;
The Trombone yells to the Moon.

And the lily-white maid, like a slip of sin,
Goes shoogling simian-wise;
While the nigger-man, like a black-lead god,
Rolls the white of his lecherous eyes.

The neurotic kid—in the nude save a rag—
Gets maddened beyond control,
In a hunger for all that is potent of sex
She goes wasting—body and soul!

Her played-out mate needs the jungle drum;
Her heart needs the animal wail;
And the black man gloats as he tickles in both
Old instincts that tell of the tail!

To his obscene sounds the whites are a-dance—
Eyes locked in hypnotic stare;
With feelings suffused by intimate scents
They are doped to—"the devil-may-care":—

A-slithering, rubbing, wriggling along;
To the gurgling, thrummy beat—
In a queer-like play of the furry sort;
With a decadent joy in their feet.

While the African buck, in the white man's kit—
Top-hat, starched-front, solitaire;
Ukuleles in glee to the rhythmic throb,
Wakes the old time beast in his lair.

PITTENDRIGH MACGILLIVRAY.

THE DUCK'S BEAK

by LES ROBINSON

It was a mysterious locality; one that seemed trying with all its might to appear different, entirely, from any other place in the least like it.

But the quickness of the sand could not deceive the eye, at least it did not for a moment deceive the practised eye of the traveller, whose name was Henry. He knew a desert when he saw one. Yet it must not therefore be supposed that the area under mention was by any means the ordinary kind of desert, just sand, palm trees, camels, cactus plants, oases, mirages, vultures, siroccos, and horizons. For one thing, there were no palm trees, no camels, no cactus-plants, no oases, no mirages, no siroccos, nor was there any sign of anything that could truthfully be said to resemble in any way a vulture. And, as far as could be seen with ordinary eyes, there was nothing in the least like a horizon. The existence of any such thing, in fact, was entirely a matter for conjecture. An inexhaustible supply of excellent building sand, however, was to be had without asking, and entirely free of charge.

Toitoi-toitoi-toitoitoitoi, exclaimed the sand every time Henry's left boot pressed it too hard, which occurred with unfailing and rhythmic frequency. Those who think that there was more in this than met the eye suffer from inaccurate discernment. The explanation—simplicity itself—is that Henry was slightly lamer in one foot than in the other. But he was not depressed by this misfortune.

Every now and then, too, the "piff-paff" bird, which makes a noise exactly like a railway engine waiting at a station, found occasion to make itself heard. Where there are more than one, or, in other words, where there is an assemblage of piff-paff birds, the accumulated noise they make suggests that there are more railway engines than one, or, to speak more truly, that there is an assemblage of railway engines waiting at all the many platforms of some gigantic station. Henry's opinion was that the piff-paff bird had works inside it which closely resembled those of a locomotive, instead of the soft kind possessed by other birds, and that in this structural peculiarity lay the explanation of the piff-paffing noise, made in moments of exhaustion.

In the particular desert that forms the subject of these remarks, there were more piff-paff birds than anything, except sand and drawbacks. It is therefore not at all surprising that whenever the traveller shut his eyes (and at frequent intervals he did so, in order to rid himself of the view), he should find it hard to escape the delusion that, somewhere close at hand, was a station from which innumerable locomotives did not start; a station, that is to say, where they remained at the platforms all day long and all night as well, public holidays included, instead of commencing to go anywhere, or to pass through on the return journey. For the flight, or hustle, of these birds was extremely silent. Not a single piff-paff was to be heard while they were on the wing. Every now and then, in a persistently futile and un-

rewarded search for an oasis, one of these feathered enigmas would hurtle quite close to Henry, but as its piff-paff mechanism was fitted with a silencer, and its flight so swift as to be utterly invisible, he was saved the delusion that he would be run over.

It was a most abominable morning; a morning that seemed boiling with exasperation, or to have been flung, sizzling, from a furnace belching flames of fiendish hate. The Blmpwa trees were nowhere to be seen. It would be felt, perhaps, that they had absented themselves from the picture because they did not like the incandescence which, with relentless and blisterous persistency, was emitted by the sun. This, however, is not the case. Nothing, in fact, was quite so pleasing to these tropic trees as blisterously persistent solar incandescence. They suffered, however, from timidity, and had noticed the approach of Henry; and it was entirely on this account that they had sunk quickly out of sight in the sand.

"What a pity it is," remarked Henry to himself, "that one cannot with safety eat sand, or exchange it for something more volatile and not so gritty. If one could do either without fatigue or risk," he added, "my presence in this desert might be very easily explained; but, speaking to myself quite frankly, there is no real reason why I should be here at all. In fact," he muttered, petulantly, "I wish I'd stayed in bed."

It was at this moment that he saw the Fundamental Podargus. You, perhaps, have never seen one. For that matter, neither have I, and, until then, neither had Henry.

The Fundamental Podargus seemed oblivious to its surroundings, and to be totally disinterested in the approach of the traveller. It was searching diligently for something in the grass. If I have not mentioned grass before, it is for the reason that in most deserts there is none. But if anybody is still of the opinion that this was just the everyday seen-one-you've-seen-them-all kind of desert, I can only infer that the explanations so far attempted have been utterly misunderstood, and that my attempts at description have been misleading and unsuccessful.

The Fundamental Podargus, which, never having seen, I shall not attempt to describe, was gwuncking miserably while, at the same time, peering with meticulous care under every blade of grass.

"What are you looking for?" inquired Henry, with a curioisty for which, by the self-centred, he had often been rebuked.

"What do you think?" answered the Fundamental Podargus, in a tone of voice that, to cognisant ears, would have conveyed a warning that it was not in an affable mood.

"I am incapable of thought," said Henry, and this, in fact, was nothing less than the truth, for he was undoubtedly an ignorant man.

"I am looking for the duck's beak," said the Fundamental Podargus in tones of great solemnity. And, thereupon, it recommenced its search with redoubled vigour.

To anyone capable of thought and, consequently, of suspicion, an answer such as that given by the Fundamental Podargus to an innocent question would have seemed deliberately rude or inane. It must not be forgotten, however, that Henry, as he

had most truthfully observed, was incapable of thought and likewise of suspicion. Although I do not think so, it is also possible, perhaps, that be remembered at this juncture, that in all matters pertaining to scientific research it is only the truth that counts. Even supposing that he remembered anything of the kind, which is extremely doubtful, Henry's error would have been the belief that the Fundamental Podargus was engaged in scientific research, for, as will shortly appear, this was certainly not the case.

"I should not have thought that ducks would thrive in such a dry and sandy place," remarked Henry, whose curiosity once aroused could not be assuaged without difficulty.

"They certainly do not thrive," said the Fundamental Podargus. "In fact," he added, with a wicked leer, "having once been enticed here, they are seldom heard of again. You see," he explained, "I am remarkably fond of duck."

"So am I," said Henry, with an artlessness rare and wholly charming in one who had already celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday. "But how, may I inquire, sir," said he, "do you manage to lure them to this desolate and arid spot? Do you perchance quack like other ducks, in order to deceive them?"

"Not at all, not at all," said the Fundamental Podargus. "I make a noise which, I assure you, is entirely different. It exactly resembles, instead, the dabbling of innumerable beaks in exceedingly filthy water. That fetches them," he added, "and enables the Podarguses to have duck for dinner nearly every Sunday."

"Yes," said Henry. "But why, may I ask, are you searching for the duck's beak? Beaks are no good."

"Without wishing to appear discourteous, Henry," said the Fundamental Podargus, which in some remarkable way had guessed the traveller's name, "let me say at once, that in this respect I am totally unable to agree with you, and if you would like a musical instrument made of duck's beaks, you may leave your order with me."

"Then I am mad already?" exclaimed Henry.

"Not at all, not at all," said the Fundamental Podargus, at the same time gwuncking reassuringly.

Toitoi-toitoi-toitoitoitoi, remarked the sand again, at frequent intervals, for it was now to be observed that Henry, attached to a thick chain, was being led by the Fundamental Podargus towards one of the secluded retreats with which the desert was plentifully supplied. Some little light, perhaps, is shed on this latter circumstance by the fact, curious though it may be considered, that instead of the nasal appendage common to the bulk of mankind, Henry was endowed by Nature with a beak, and one so closely resembling the beak of a duck that experts, among whom may be numbered the Fundamental Podargus, failed to detect the slightest dissimilarity.

"Piff-paff! Piff-paff!" exclaimed several of these singular birds, from where they had stopped twenty minutes ago to shunt at an imaginary station; and now that Henry was well on his way to wherever the Fundamental Podargus was going, the Blmpwa tree, after listening carefully for awhile, rose slowly out of the sand and once more resumed the perpendicular.

SPRING IN LONDON

by IVAN GOLL

TRANSLATED BY RICHARD CLOUDESLEY SAVAGE

THE tube-trains of my heart explode
The copper-coloured heaven sieved by red-hot cigars
While on a wide pneumatic zephyr's wings
I soar a poet heavier than the air
Unto a nickelled sun that sinks into the bath
Upon the yellow fog.

We must have eyes of radium
In this cemented century of concrete and hypocrisy
To see the new mythology
Of Cyclops with spiked beards and barbèd hair
In the automatic city of despair
The dawn descends inside a lift
For London ne'er has heard a crowing cock
Nor has she founts and pools wherein to lave the heart
The jewellers display their necklaces of tears behind the glass
The barbers have forgotten all their fairy tales
And every day down streets akin
The same dead figures lose themselves
Aweary of the rain
Weary of bread too dear
The only life beneath the bridges flows
And all too late we wanderers understand
And bear our bitter pains from one bank to another
From one to the other
Our Father which art in heaven give us our daily dread
Lest wearied out we die

All, all were wholly lost without the maternal sea
Whose breast hangs o'er the docks
With springtides of vanilla
Of vermouth and the saps of summers sweet with scent
And elephantastic Indias
And freights from the North Pole

The kings are dead unless they live again in photographs
But Whitechapel reigns on
The fat Jewesses swell with crimson lusts
With stars that gleam between their powdered breasts
Another and more sportive Jesus treads
The streets where Charlie Chaplin saw the light
Behind East Ham soars up a Buddha wrought in bronze
The sun partakes of tea

Incendiaries ignite the twilight's house
And gilded firemen douse the fire with Scotch

At last the night of Egypt's Queens

Smiling sweethearts sprout again from leather
With lean and perished necks
They rise again from their sarcophagi
And haunt the British Museum
And all were lost without thee
Dawn antique
Primæval breeze from tilled and furrowed fields
Where still the hares believe in God

Spring in its infancy the tennis courts
The hills the drunkards' cries
And the hundred thousand typewriters
This morning in Trafalgar Square
Shall drink of Shelley's spirit

O banner bluish-white

The streams of copper rise as mercury in the heat.

BAZIN—AND AT NEW YORK

by W. J. TURNER

REGARD this scene! Is it not terrible to see these mountains
sombre and storm-bound
Behind the bright window-pane of a Bond St. dealer
Who is not inside but lives in New York, beyond the
Atlantic!
He has a flat on the top of a sky-scraper but his windows are
heavily curtained
And on his walls are landscapes, all the moods of nature
Mirrored by French Impressionists, by Cézanne and by
Gauguin.

It is the stillness that is remarkable, do you not notice?
The stillness of storm, of water, of cloud and forest,
Mountains—lightning-wandered without a flicker,
Purpled with the shadow of thunder.

On his carpet the foot falls silently,
The light everywhere is light reflected.
Outside, far off, there burns a Star
Shrivelling the eyeballs, but here remembered and recol-
lected
Into pools of tranquillity—the minds of dead artists,
Moons shining from the walls
Lit by dead fires of emotion.

But no orb rises among these mountains
In the absence of the living.

Rapture of crystallization
Shut in the hollow of a sky-scraper
Sparkling like salt in the daylight!

Cities of salt by the seaside
Exuded out of mind and matter!

Bright shells their strange geometry
Shells of the microbe twisting within,
This Bond St. dealer living like a book-worm
Among visions of the dead!

Whose *Countenance* sits waiting among the mountains
Frozen into rocks?
It is not day there nor night nor early evening.

Image of the sun sitting in an antique chair
Surrounded by the moon-dead
By Monet and Manet,
Handling the small flames of volcanoes
Petrified in his collection of rubies—
The waves of the Atlantic and the Pacific
Move no more but are like shells silent
Memory of the sea!

Thou glow-worm of the everlasting *Burning*
Among these cooled images,
Images of instantaneous lightning,
Sleep on completely circled
O *Moon!*

THE ROMAN PAVEMENT

by SHERARD VINES

I

Roar, old Hyemps, the world's horn-mad
At your dull cornopeans:
Roar like a mastodon possesst
With blizzard-ghosts out of Siberia
Forsaken by his kind on the white deserts
That moan beneath their ache of snow,
As the twilight encrusts them
In laminous iron.
Old Hyemps, with your raw-dropped nose,
I hear streaming through the upper sky
Your bellowing to the wolves
Which frights the winter comets till
They clash their icy tails.
I hear the branches creak and scratch
Icicle on icicle, but I turn
Away from the jewel-stiffened ritual dance
Of silver angles to the moon,
A frost blister shivering on heaven's bridge of steel
As it flings down numb poplar shadows
Blue and clinking on the crystal world.
Poor Tom a-cold, your flinty nails
Grate, but in vain, on bolted shutters,
Bright, valiant surfaces.
And vainly your wide-mouthed mask of tragedy
Stalks on snow-muffled snow cothurnus,
Grislier by the altitude
Of a chopine
Through rows of blasted kail.

Fools make love now in glass nooks,
In January groves that hiss,
The skeletons of polar worms.
Wise men are spared these pains;
Some breathe hot islands on an Indian dawn
Where palms lean down to briny steam,
Others, a tropic clamour in the fire
As phœnix after phœnix dies
And faints away in nacrous dust
Touching with a kiss, diffident as delicate
The chessmen's ivory crowns.

II

March, it is said, has blown a church to sea
And drawn chromatic modes
From roadside wires; Æolian, flies.
Still drops a coolness, pale from Shakespeare's cliff
On channel decks, and shepherd-plaids
Are closely drawn, flasks light as the earliest
Showers of vernal gold
Drip from cloud-balconies.
Come, Flora in a classic robe
All asphodel, too long unknown
To northmen and their dark romance,
Observe auriculas that nod
In wet winds out of Italy
At the tunnel's sweating lip. Tourists have bound
White crocus in their hats, and loudly praise
Numberless freshets, each with its bow
Gladdening hotels by jaded ice.
At the world's end, beneath flounced cherry-trees
Pink with lascivious foam,
Old men fall, drunk, to sleep
On paper twists and broken food,
Dreaming of gilded Aprils, before they crept
With brownly furrowed tortoise-necks,
But might admire the petalled girls
That dance, half-naked, by canals
Of sewage blue as ink, and call
The eastern Graces home
From white Malavan gulfs.

III

Summanus hangs head downward in the breathless cave
Of midnight, his dragons knotted round him
Pointing a basilisk. Before his dangers
Dogs pant and howl, muttering plagues are crouched
By privy-wall. Here are doings;
Murder will out, and violation
In park-thickets or matted bamboo jungle.
Could I drink easement, know the rush
Of chariot-wheels in mountain wind
As cooling flights of sound
From lute or hydraulus,

Unseen, but smoothing all the dark
These glaring Julian Kalends
Should pass, like linen in a field
Careless and bright. But summer's art,
Yesterday's woof of harshness that
The cicalas, untiring, set
To ambush laggard heat
And lead day prisoner to galling plots
Where the burnt winds hasten on feet of brass
Scorching young lotus in a turtled mere,
Burns as a lightless sanctuary lamp
Before the red Priapus of the east.
But if night-herons whoop after the smoke
Of showers that trail a sudary
Cloak-like, in fevers of escape
Washed orchids gape with eyes of mauve
At evening crowds, drifting lanternwards
To swan-prowed boats lit up, to shake
Dim ferries with their mandolines
Or drink among the gourds
Of horned verandahs.

IV

Come, Vertumnus! Ox and coulter
Are soon abroad, and rustic fires
Unravel their thin wool in clews and lariats
Slung to the farther lawn where colchicum
Tongued with a glede spears up to cure these halting times
Since August's pace was hot, and curious his diet.
Now sugred bubbles of the earth's summer-altered blood
Dear baubles of Samos or Touraine
Jingle their tassels to the wine-moon, and to the sun
All brown and bearded like a barley-mow.
Vertumnus, you may pluck this moon
And dry her on your rafters,
A pompion, winter delicate
Relished when Aquilo whistles among
Belated stars, and snuffs them with a flaw.
Shake the blue leaves from heaven and melt them
In savoury mists, nurturing where fields lie nude,
Our pillaged Nubian mistresses,
They from whose pangs we draw
Bean-flesh to curdle and gilded oil
To anoint our reeking festival.
Bless our estranged allotments, where Adonis dies
By gas-works, and by sidings hot
With eager wheels: victorious wheat
In ochred centuries sits down
Before suburras of a continent
Bivouacked against the grand assault
At bugle wholly goes to breach
Lean markets, and the months enrich.
Come Vertumnus, captain these
To imperial victories.

ARMOUR

by KATHLEEN ARNOLD PRICE

COLUMBA has come out from visiting her lover. Voluptuousness has fallen from her, her blood flows temperately. She stands looking across Paris, looking at its silhouettes, enjoying its curves and perpendiculars and angles. She wants to stretch out her hands and crisp her palms about the turrets and domes. The solidity of the world delights her.

The Seine under the sunshine is like a pigeon's head. The sky is Benedictine. She turns up the narrow rue du Bac, walking with steady even steps, poised in the comforted quiet of a practising Catholic returning from the dear familiar miracle of the mass. But where is she going? The rue du Bac will lead her home. And why indeed go home to the *pension* where Yvonne and Suzanne are also young and have lovers? A slow man with heavy jaws looks over her leisurely and says as he passes, "Que tu es jolie!" But that is nothing. She sees the bright flame of her youth reflect for a moment in the sodden dough-faces of *jeunes filles prolongées* who pass. She knows she has "come beautiful." Her body is quick with Maurice's love. He has kissed beauty into her ears and fingers and feet. But where is she going? She does not want to feel this quiet-burning contentment falling asunder into the ashes of a desultory mood. Curiously she thinks of Miss Harrison. Miss Harrison, bleached, flat-footed, romantic, bilious . . . why of her? She takes a bus to the Bon Marché and walks from there into the rue du Cherche-Midi. The dusty lukewarm-smelling rue du Cherche-Midi, the dark doorway, the perilous ascent past the laundry of the concierge in the three-cornered court, the acrid sauerkraut atmosphere. Looking at the greasy blur upon the tall heavy door where many dirty knuckles have knocked, she hears Miss Harrison's shuffling, slippered feet approaching; and as the white fringe and black eyebrows come round the door—"C'est moi, Columba—je puis entrer?"

"My dear!—Entrez, of course."

"You are not too busy?" says Columba inattentively, against the faint, welcoming murmur. She knows Miss Harrison is not too busy, for she has drawn her into the room, holding both her hands, and Columba is mechanically caressing the rough-skinned cold fingers.

"You are working?" she says, for that also is the thing to say.

"No! I'm not working! I'm going to have my tea which I hate so having, but now I shall enjoy it, for I shall look at you, and forget the horrible business of eating."

Miss Harrison is taking off Columba's small hat and touching her hair, smiling into her face, breathing upon her eyelids. Columba does not like the touching and breathing very much. But Miss Harrison's smiling and caressing are like a mirror to her beauty. Here, looking into the withered, flat old face with the mobile eyebrows, she feels the joy of Maurice's love rising in a silent spring within her. The quiet mood is quickened to exulting. She wants to laugh. There is a bubble of laughter

in her throat. But while Miss Harrison flaps away into the kitchen and back again with some sighing murmur about the milkman and China tea, she is looking about, uneasy, puzzled, her glance running along the dusty mantelshelf, skipping over the huddle of pictures and drawings on the green walls, probing the odd forlorn bits of furniture in the dark corners.

"Miss Harrison!" she says abruptly. "Where is Venus?"

She knows now what is wrong with the familiar room. The big dirty cast of Venus de Milo no longer stands awkwardly on the corner of the mantelshelf.

"Ah!" says Miss Harrison. "You've noticed that! Poor Venus! Venus has departed for the present. You see, I've got my *Penseur* instead."

She picks up the *Penseur* sitting solidly in the middle of the mantelpiece.

"I thought I would put him up there," she sighs, beginning to dust his interstices with her handkerchief, "so that I could look at him and . . . perhaps . . . find out some day all he means."

Musée Rodin and the cool shining flags echoing to their strolling steps, the violent bronzes, Maurice's hand just touching her upper arm, Maurice's indolent teasing voice laughing, speaking profanity of Art and of Art's pundits and of atelier clichés and most of all, of Columba's own "serious" work.

"What do you know about it, my dear? You can't even draw."

She hears his raillery and understands it with her mind, but it does not mean anything to her and she knows it does not mean anything to him; it is just cleverness, just the effervescence of the excitement of their love. But the *Penseur*—all the stupidity of the world in the humped back—Rodin braying at the intelligentsia? At any rate, she doesn't like allegory.

". . . Seven, eight, nine," sighs Miss Harrison, counting out her prunes. "I do so *hate* prunes, but I must eat them because . . ."

Columba does not listen, for she knows why Miss Harrison must eat prunes. Everybody knows why one eats prunes. Then Miss Harrison speaks of her liver and Columba makes a sympathetic noise and says: "Ah, yes, my mother . . ." for her mother suffers from her kidneys, which is nearly the same thing.

"Of course," says Miss Harrison, "my *digestion* has never had a chance . . ."

"Yes, I know, when you were a child . . ."

Columba hastily stops her, for she remembers the tale—"*had to cook and carry up my mother's breakfast three flights of stairs—feed the birds—run to school*"—Miss Harrison running to school?—flat-footed, holding down the flapping white fringe?—oh, silly, silly!—but the bubble of laughter comes back to her throat.

"No," says Miss Harrison gently. "It goes further back than that—I think we must ascribe it to Pre-natal Influence."

Columba turns her head abruptly to look at the pictures jostling each other above the sofa.

"Are you working much at present?" she says in a laughter-roughened voice.

"I'm doing a portrait, but my subject isn't very *sympathique*. This I don't think you've seen—I did it lately in the Parc Monceau."

Columba looks at a tone composition—broken column, tree and carefully painted, sunny foreground.

"It's very good." She prolongs the scant praise with an appreciative gesture.

"Of course, I'm a back number!" says Miss Harrison, softly laughing. "I'm an *Impressionist!*"

Columba watches the gymnastics of eyebrows and lips for a moment before she understands that Miss Harrison has said something naughty and is being unrepentant about it, just like her mother when she says, "*I haven't called on Madame Meunier yet!*"

"Oh . . . mais . . ." she says, confused. "The Impressionists . . ."

"Were the best painters ever lived," says Miss Harrison comfortably. "Those little Luxembourg studies you liked . . . I sold them for 100 francs each."

"*For* 100 *francs!*" says Columba, politely shocked.

"That's what my doctor said when he was attending me last winter for pleurisy. 'But,' he said, 'you *mustn't* sell your work so cheap! You really *mustn't* sell your work so cheap!' I said: 'My dear doctor, I don't *need* to sell my pictures! I don't *want* to sell my pictures! Thank God, by making little economies, I have enough to live on. I like to have my pictures round me.' What should I do without my Art?"

Columba turns, crosses the room to look at a drawing pinned between the two windows—an unfinished atelier nude. Here is safety. Grinning secretly upon the heavily-shaded buttocks, she says distinctly, exuberantly, within herself, "Art! je m'en fou." She turns quickly, mumbling, "So late—I must go." It is not late, but she is suddenly bored with finding answers. Miss Harrison no longer amuses her. She wants to get away.

In the rue du Cherche-Midi she does not hurry. Six o'clock and no reason for arriving at the *pension* before dinner. She walks deliberately, staring into the brasseries which are still almost empty. At one of the scratched and faded iron tables before a small cafe sits a fat woman with a grenadine sirop. She wears a black satin frock and white canvas shoes and is leaning back, her knees wide apart. Passing on, Columba looks without pausing at the small china dolls and coloured cigarette-holders in the tobacconists' windows, at the long fringe of hanging wrist-watches in the jewellers'. Her deliberate steps bear her down the long rue du Vaugirard. A black cat lies asleep in a window full of *point de Venise* lace.

She looks at Foyot's and at the dark door of the Musée Luxembourg, blank and expressionless as the mouth of a Greek mask. Her thought flies into the Musée and up to the Berthe Morisot hanging in the little crowded room on the right-hand side of the hall. Foyot's she does not know and does not think about. She is not curious.

To-morrow she will tell Maurice all about Miss Harrison—her prunes, her fringe, her Penseur and her Impressionism. She will make him laugh and say something clever and rude about the atelier Julien or self-expression.

"*Art!*" says wicked Maurice. "Mostly excrements, my dear."

RABEVEL.

The word shapes slowly before her eyes like an illuminated advertisement. It holds them. She looks away, out under the arches of the peristyle of the Odéon. Rabevel ceases to be tall, black letters, it becomes a vibration like the low twanging of a wire. *Rabevel.* Because of some deep affinity of perceptions she cannot guess at, she thrills to it as a musical instrument gives back a note sounded near it. It quivers through her blood to her heart. The queer twinge at her heart makes her smell Marseilles and feel under the soles of her feet the throbbing of the screws of the steamer that took her to Corsica last summer. She looks back. Rabevel lies down, subdued within a fine black border, on a lemon cover, a name on a book, a book among books. She reads titles, her eyes skipping over cream and yellow oblongs, some unviolated in their advertisement bands.

Ariel, vie de Shelley; Le Martyre de l'Obèse; Cœur pensif ne sait ou il va; Ainsi va toute chair. . . . Bah! Titles of books. Books one would certainly never want to read. The gospel according to Messrs. Paul Bourget and Samuel Butler. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Q.E.D.

But some day—some far day—she will buy Rabevel. Perhaps she will never read it. She will set it on a shelf unread to give her pleasure as a connotation of secret riches like Nineveh and the Eleusian mysteries.

A young man trailing a long ebony cane pauses beside Columba to look at the books. Columba observes him. He is bareheaded and the dark waves of his hair are as crisp and close and silken as the wrinkled skin of the Seine. His calm white forehead recedes gently. His lips are slender and red and fresh as a girl's. His teeth would be small and round. His chin is cleft. He looks perfectly artificial and perfectly simple and pleases Columba. He passes her, trailing his stick, moving languidly. His blood is perhaps a little too pure. He pauses opposite the fountain, looks up at the Panthéon and across at the Luxembourg gardens. Virginity is still in his eyes.

The Luxembourg gardens are full of lovers.

Columba turns away from the Boulevard Saint Michel and begins to descend homeward towards Saint Sulpice. A dingy white cat sits crouched against a dusty door. A milk cart rests on its shafts, the two chained dogs lying beside it. In the middle of the narrow street is a pedlar's cart drawn by a donkey. A pot-bellied man in shirt and trousers is concentrating all his energy on beating the donkey. He raises his arm upward and backward—Columba's eyes swing the semicircle with the end of his stick. Her measured step bears her past him before the stick descends. She hears it fall behind her with the flat thick sound of a carpet-beater.

Immediately she sees the newspaper bonnet, sturdy calves and wide swaying skirts of an old woman beating carpets on the banks of the Rhone. Flat and thick the beater falls on the faded rugs hanging over the upper wall of the quay. The Rhone is seething silver, too bright to gaze at. All down the quay she can see two parallel scarlet ribbons—stalls of heaped strawberries in the market under the plane trees. The sweet heavy fragrance of them is in her nostrils as she makes her way through the choking dust and débris of some demolitions behind S. Sulpice.

MADAME LABISMINA

by FREDERICK CARTER

Monsieur Paradie Bourgeois walked into the consulting parlour of Madame Labismina with that unconscious air of condescension which derived from his unparalleled sense of the nice adjustment of social values, and of his own position amongst them. One knew, therefore, at a first glance, that he was a personage of assured respectability and a considerable influence in his world.

Indeed, he was known for his authoritative opinion upon all things desirable and suitable to the middle class, whether matters of a material, or a moral, or an intellectual nature. This, too, as he explained (when he felt it to be necessary) was a matter of deliberated choice, for, wide-ranged as were the titles and connections through which by family and wealth he might well demand for himself some place in the higher ranks of his country's extensive nobility—yet in a conservative and gentlemanly way he had declined to assert his right to such dignity as he well knew his estate and blood gave claim. Instead he remained a leader and exemplary figure in that invaluable middle order of society.

Square-bearded, with full ruddy cheeks, he showed an impressive presence as he entered the parlour of Madame Labismina. Close buttoned in his frock coat he glanced about with the peculiarly swift, appraising glance habitual to his small alert eyes. He saw that the room was arranged as usual and Madame herself was seated at the long richly carved table at which she was accustomed to receive her clients. Heavy curtains looped with thick silk cords hung at door and window. So many times before he had been received by her in just the same fashion. So many times. How many was it? He could not quite remember and yet each visit had been made as the result of one of the secret and dreadful tragedies which had so affected his life.

It is peculiar, thought he, I do not remember to have ever before considered my visits here to have been frequent. The very thought was like a twinge. Such an odd stirring of emotion seemed implicit in the visits; it was really sad—and so often! But—he qualified—this feeling is unusual! Was it well to have new thoughts, new feelings? He did not like changes of opinion;

variations were of advantage. But changes?—there was always danger in change. Uneasily he felt that these ideas suggested some flaw in the carapace of his formidable propriety and his strict rectitude in sentiment.

In her customary fashion Madame Labismina remained seated at the head of the table with its heavy tablecloth, and graciously bowed in return to his dignified salutation. As ever she held before her face a mask, a beautiful mask of an exquisite and young and charming face. Perhaps it was necessary—nobody knew—but clearly she must be old—old—old despite her fresh and subtly ringing voice. Always she wore long white gloves, and a ruff of lace about her neck which reached to her ears and their pendent earrings. Magnificent with scalloped flounces of silk was her dress, strange and antique in its fashion, embroidered and worked with patterns of flowers and fruit and with silvery shimmerings as of tiny streams about it, and rustlings as of leaves of trees and thrills of soft breezes blowing its folds.

She was a person of whom her clients were disposed to recount wonderfully odd and romantic things, for she was the greatest marriage broker of the day and, it was said, of many before it. Indeed it has been rumoured that the nineteenth century was her very period, that she died on its last day having been born in its first year. And of all things of course the strangest about her singular person was that notable fantasy which gave such an arresting distinction to her old world elegance, the employment of the mask. For these masks were portraits of the marriageable demoiselles whom she offered to the choice of her clients, swiftly and subtly changing manner and voice as she presented each to their notice. And so the very person was brought vividly to their view. Indeed, none ever said other than that so surely and truly was each mimed that it was as if she had herself been set before them. And it was considered too a matter of honourable distinction to be on her books, for her clientèle was of the most select and eminent, and her manner of conducting affairs exceedingly discreet.

Monsieur Paradie Bourgeois sat down upon the chair to which her bow directed him in silence and as he did so he firmly replaced his silk hat on his head. He was there upon business and certainly not to elaborate complimentary and formal politenesses. He knew too that Madame preferred her clients to act thus directly. It was not necessary for him to enter upon any explanations, for the preliminary agreement conducted with her secretary had been of the most definite and precise description, even proceeding to matters of the most intimate and meticulous detail.

But that he remembered had been long, long ago, for in his opinions he did not change. He had been an excellent client and had returned again and again making no complaint that the marital arrangements there entered upon had been at the least unsatisfactory, for, in the beginning, always, things had gone well. Between himself and Madame he felt a deep and understanding sympathy. There was no need with her to infringe any of the tactful ordinances or reserves of society; she possessed marvellous intuition and an exquisite power of delicate suggestion, so that matters of extremest intimacy were intimated by the

inflections of the most usual phrases of polite conversation, and strange conventions were established by a slight stress upon a word of affirmation or denial.

Here he had returned again and again in his long search to find the perfect wife. He was of his age and thus he looked forth upon life and the world; a perfect wife could and must be found. All else that might be desired he had and this he would attain. They had differed in their charm but each had aroused in him a trusting passion. Not all were in the common sense beautiful, but there was, it seemed, a vice that none of them had escaped. A monstrous yet seemingly inevitable failing possessed the whole sex, the one in which lay immeasurable iniquity, the primal error: they were all inquisitive.

And as he maintained it was quite enough that he should forbid. Was he not the head, the disposer of power, the holder of the thunders of righteousness, the dynamic and central authority? He held high views of his responsibility. As a person of consequence, looked up to as an example, the cynosure of so many inferiors, it was necessary that he should offer a pattern of invincible directness and assurance in following the scrupulously correct way, the fashion in which things are done by the best people. Well, he knew how much depends upon example. He felt that, at least, the exemplary virtues should be his. Again and again—as he, a student of the history of behaviour well knew—time had evidenced the terrible destruction and successive upheavals which had resulted from visible evil and misconduct in high places.

Never had he permitted a public display of his deeply outraged sense of the inviolacy of his express, definite, and explicit prohibition. Ah! Why could they never refrain from playing fast and loose, prying and peering with that last indecency of curiosity, outraging the primary laws of conduct, and repeating that primordial offence whereby mankind had lost the original glory of paradise. Why?

Yet, however outraged—and though cruelly stricken to the very quick of his moral nature—he had not displayed vulgar rancour. He had not dragged them before the public gaze to repudiate them in a tyrannical and revolting action at law, leaving them to wither out tormented years alone and wretchedly exiled from the newer paradise which social order so slowly has fenced in from the outer chaos of common herd-life. Oh no! Matters had been arranged with that decency and order which the nineteenth-century social Eden of propriety so well understood.

After an explanation of his knowledge of her violation of his absolute commandment, the casting down of his appointment and charge, and the peculiar horror of her offence, some outbreak on her part—either a repudiation of his authority or a similar breach of decorum—always had made it an obvious and necessary matter to arrange for her disappearance. Obduracy and impertinence were, alas, so frequent.

After the splendour of most distinguished and funereally magnificent obsequies he had applied to Madame Labismina for the mask which once had so charmed him, and he had

placed it with the others in a private room. There he went for retirement and quiet, 'twas his own room secret, apart and never entered by any other except himself and a discreetly invisible servant who, like all the others of this excellently ordered mansion was—or affected to be—entirely dumb. And this room he furnished in the same style as the room of Madame Labismina. Here, when world-weary, he chose to withdraw, and sitting in his armchair, in the midst of a magnificent crimson oriental carpet, he would gaze at the array of exquisitely made and beautiful masks and reflect upon the illusions of the past and the singular dispensations of time. Of the future he thought little, what was there to trouble him indeed? for his ancestors' foresight had relegated such difficulties to a decent oblivion. So far as—humanly speaking—such things may be, they had been whelmed in the limbo of which the gates in our days are securely guarded by banker and lawyer.

Folly and the horrid prejudice of the baser folk had elaborated wild rumours about this quiet room of his. Their distorted knowledge—gained it may be from some passing glimpse by the keyhole—reported that it contained the decapitated heads of his past wives. An absurd notion derived from the barbarous folk ideas of the ages gone by.

And so his mind seemed to stray from the purpose of his visit in a manner which differentiated this occasion from all the others. Regarding the changing masks as Madame Labismina manipulated them so swiftly, alternating one and another before her face, his attention had wandered, and only when he was aware of a hasty movement of hers which suggested impatience, did he indicate that he desired to converse with one of them. He talked with one or another. But yet the persons were not, somehow, so beautifully and convincingly mimed as they had been on earlier occasions, when the enigmatic personage who set them before his eyes, lifting from the heap on the table a mere mask, with a turn of the hand and a few words had set it alive bringing its original into being before him.

These changing visages became a phantasmagoria of seemings to him: perhaps he was no more spurred on by the desire of possession. He felt a lessened acuity in his regard and a hesitation in his choice. Doubt came upon him. Never had he been a creature of impulse, but always a sense of conviction had actuated his will. And yet he had entered this house just as usual, impelled just as usual by the long unfulfilled desire which he had striven for those years through those tragedies to consummate. And if his desire had failed was his will bound up therein?

A wave of self-confidence, a deep upwelling of the ego came upon him. He was now, he felt, more deliberate, a man mature and experienced, capable of a certain and secure choice. This time, after all, it should be a veritable and true complement that he would find. Yes, earlier, he had been deceived by the urge of desire, and the essential will within him had been deflected. It was queer that he should hesitate, but, really, there was a certain queerness in this house of masks.

He smiled and chose Samela.

The formalities of legal agreement and ceremony at last completed, he and his young bride proceeded to his great house in the country and during months he joyed in placid contentment. A time came however when he felt that there was need of change in order that both he and his wife might have the advantage of a little period of repose and so avoid lassitude in their mutual affection. He announced that important official business compelled his attendance in the capital. Duly he left his house. Equipped for the journey, he gave as he left into the hands of his young wife, Samela, the keys of the mansion, with definite instructions that all were for her use except that one key must not be used, one door must not be opened, one room must not be entered. His own room. Just as he had done before so often—and so often, alas, he had been disappointed—his confidence betrayed, his room disordered, disarranged. "But remember," said he, "remember; the reward of curiosity is the wages of sin." A strange phrase which she turned over in her mind a few times and then forgot.

She had felt alarmed at the thought of being alone in the great house with its obsequious unseen servitors, and her youth would be oppressed, she declared, at the coming solitude; could she not have her sister to bear her company during the absence of her beloved lord and master? "True, indeed," he replied. "That is quite natural. My little one shall have her sister Anne as companion whilst I am away. Once I should have declined to give my permission, for I detested any relatives or family ties belonging to my wife; but now I am broader in my views: one must avoid prejudice. Yes, yes! By all means send for your sister, my dear, one must avoid prejudice. But she must only stay until the day of my return a month hence precisely!"

Setting out then prepared for a long day's journey he took a circuitous route and returned at dusk, entering the house secretly. He shut himself in the forbidden room, his own place of reflection, and taking down the masks and spreading them on the table he became absorbed in his recollections of past loves and disappointments. He slept and dreamed, and awakened, and so drowsed in a flood of memories that he did not know whether he yet slept and dreamed or awakened again, nor observed the passage of time until suddenly he heard the key grate in the lock. He groaned, a bitter pain was at his heart. "Yet again, yet again, betrayed, betrayed, my trust betrayed," he murmured.

His wife stood before him at the open door, her face filled with terror. Her two hands were upraised, one touching her trembling chin. She stood motionless. Behind, looking over her shoulder, stood her twin sister. Their faces were frozen with fear. Gaping, with half-open mouths and empty eyes they stared at the master of the mysterious chamber. His table, covered with the masks of those who had entered there unbidden in the past, was between them.

And it seemed as if they stood there for an age like stones, until again the sorrow came and the pain, so extreme that his eyes clouded—and Monsieur Bourgeois was beside the table

of Madame Labismina. There they stood facing across the wide table. It was not the twin sisters after all but the two masks in Madame Labismina's hands.

Dark anger rose a flood in his soul, the blackness of rage which had come over him when he had found his confidence betrayed by each wife in turn was but the cloud gathering before this cataclysm. This—this was the ultimate deception, a culmination of betrayal. Thus had illusion and mystification been juggled about him. She was the prime instigator of all these evils, the woman with the masks. But he would break her, together with her dreams, this weaver of evil, spell-caster, witch—she should be destroyed.

"So it is you after all, Madame," he burst out. "You are my dear wife—and her sister too?"

"Yes, they are both my masks." She leaned forward and laid one of the masks she held on the table, the face of the sister.

"Ah! so we are alone, my soul," he snarled, taking a step towards her. The bitterness and pain of his anger made him sway upon his feet. "No, no, always a third in each man's paradise," said she, and a face appeared beyond her in the door.

"My brother!" said she.

"The devil!" said Monsieur Bourgeois, and the swelling pain suffocated him.

"Parfaitement," said Madame Labismina. But Monsieur Bourgeois did not hear as he fell at her feet, for he was dead.

SABBATH MORN

by P. R. STEPHENSEN

Now in that House of Gloom the mournful priest,
Moving with care upon ancestors' bones,
Chanting in slightly too-grief-stricken tones,
Sadly prepares the sacrificial feast
Of bloodless blood and wafer with no yeast;
While the pale congregation, kneeling, moans
Empty repentances in hollow groans
Like criminals not guilty in the least . . .
So into the fields, my love, it's time to go.
These miseries will keep them occupied
An hour or more. A flowered hedge I know
Whereunder we can creep and safely hide,
And worship certain gods who laugh and play,
And do not look like Biscuit on a tray.

BARREL-ORGAN RHAPSODY

by P. R. STEPHENSEN

The Middle Class is the upperclass now
that England's gone to seed;
Dividend-drawers are reaping the harvest
sown by the bulldog breed;
They are reaping it down in the City,
placid in bowler hats;
Les aristocrats à la lanterne. . . .
but there ain't no aristocrats!
The bloodless conquerors, skimming the scum,
with a pudgily cunning hand,
Have issued shares for Jerusalem in
this green, green, pleasant land.
Life with an Income's a rather jolly,
beastly, ghastly, bore;
Nobody works no more, me lads,
and *It ain't goin' to work no more:*
The blokes at the bottom, drawing the dole,
are beginning to think it's queer,
And to grumble steadily as at the taste of
a glass of chemical beer.
Ho! some unemployed draw dividends and
some unemployed draw the dole;
And some are drawing the moral, which
is simple on the whole——
That the middle class is the muddleclass now,
and the sensible thing to do
Is to stick a financier in the guts
if he tries his finance on you.

Ah, the Iron Age is rusty and
the iron is in the soul
Of the formerly-working working men
as they dolefully draw the dole.
The working men are workless and
there ain't no work to do
Because the country is owned by a middling,
piddling investing crew
Who keep the ex-workers, not to work,
oh, no, don't make that error!
Who keep them dolefully on the dole–
–insurance against the Red Terror.
Completely-empty bellies might go
to a premium-revolution,
So the dole is quoted at par on 'Change—
a Capital solution!
The middling class, the piddling class, they
feed the brutes a bit;
And the working men of England, they
ain't satisfied with it.

Not once or twice but several times
in this rough Island's story
The end of uppish muddlers has been
sudden, sure and gory;
A muttering moral that workless workers
are drawing, on the whole,
Is that if they kill all business men,
They have Nothing to lose but the Dole.

* * * * *

Well, the Middle Class is the uppish class now
that England's gone to seed;
But the blokes on the Dole are really the boys of
the famous bulldog breed.

MUSIC

by D. GRAHAM HUTTON

The peppering of harmony at heart
Brings to a sneeze the passion of Mozart;
Colours confound in down-diffusing keys,
And the heart pauses, sickens to a sneeze,
Thuds with emotion, shakes to a new world
Where in another key the colour's furled.
Who'll have a soul for the asking? Who will have
The keen madness Music can enrave?
Who'll be the earth and sea and windy sky
And mix his manhood with a melody?

Say,—in the ruffle of the curtains red,
Did you not see the grinning of a head?
The plaster-mask? the wide, peaceful lips?
Who'll have a chord across the world's ellipse?
See,—in a room how dissipated we,
How riddled with the darts of harmony!
How are we strange, remote, from knowledge far,
Each to himself most unfamiliar!

Soaring, the orchestra with æther-wings
Beats to atomic pulp abundant strings
Of vibrant sound and unimpassioned sense
And batters Heaven with grandiloquence!

Lo! in the light we breathe away the gloom;
And was there an Intruder in the room?
It curls away, that breath upon a glass,
And on its face we see our figures pass.
Here is a friend upon the wide divan . . .
And am I merely God? or am I Man?

DUNG OF PEGASUS

by PETER MEADOWS—PART IV.

PRIDE: CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

WE sat eating gingernuts on chilly benches in the hall of the Trades Union building. Why, I never knew. It was Daisie who suggested going down to the Hamilton breakwater, playfully dropping a piece of biscuit down the back of Biccles' neck. Ruby, his girl, smiled quietly. She pulled up her dress where it had been slipping off her shoulder. I took a look back. The clock like a sootied moon blew through wheeling skies of plaster, stormy whitewash; down the stairs we chattered.

Daisie and I sat in the front of the tram; it was cold and we pressed tightly, her small body a bundle of laughter under my arm, a parcel of kisses: no stays. I felt her warmly shiver, so we kissed.

The driver turned round, so we kissed again. He applauded. The lights that flew past were hissing in the cold wind: like buoys in the flickering waves of cold. A frizzle of shocked silver where the racing cold worried them. And round the warm spot where our foreheads touched, you could feel the fringe of cold. The stars were frayed with the glassy wind. The heat was driven under the skin, and a stodgy mask of cold formed numbly.

"Can you see through the icy blur, all this smudge of numbness?" I whispered.

"Not if I kiss you," she answered in her small harsh voice.

The kiss took us past Breakfast Creek.

"Where are all the brothels here?" she asked, like a tourist.

I pointed out the top of the Chinese joss-house crumpled by moonlight. She began to recite *Kubla Khan* in a tense unexpressive tone: a slow dull delivery without cadence or inflection, but passionate.

We got off and turned to the right, lingering for a while at the wharf. I dropped some pebbles into the river, to see them break in a splash of moonlight.

"As they fall through the air," I told her, "they get coated with the air's pale silver, and that's why the moonlight spirts out when they hit the water."

"Is it——," she began seriously, like a child; then recollecting herself, she put out her tongue at me. She was a factory-girl, in the packing department for chocolates; but she spent all her spare time reading poetry, and she liked poetic fustian, anything extravagant. I sometimes wonder why I didn't marry her.

Last week I had walked home with her, at her invitation. The park up towards the Grammar School was closed at night, but it was sunken at one corner below the level of the road.

"It would be nice in there," she said and jumped over. I followed. We walked along slowly, putting the silence aside like the branches of a bush. She gave me her hand and we walked more slowly, swinging our clasped hands while she recited *Once more into the breach, dear friends*. though still the silence swished across our faces.

Suddenly she stopped in the middle of a sentence. I thought she must have seen a policeman. But it was a kiss.

"Lift me up," she said, "I want the moon." I raised her, and she stretched out her little palms and clashed her bangles together. Her thin fingers moved as though they were growing longer, up and up, longer, snakishly yearning to touch the plated moon. I let her down; and she ran a finger round under my face from ear to ear. I started. My nerves were so taut that her nail had drawn a thrill of sweet anguish after it as if it were a delicately sharpened razor that had gashed through my flesh.

She pushed her hat off backwards, while I held her with both my hands under the armpits; the hat fell to the ground.

"You're a poet, aren't you?" she said encouragingly.

The four of us stepped cautiously along the stones of the breakwater. The tide was out and the mud showed, riddled with crab-holes, upon which a slime of silver every now and then rippled and broke. Oyster-shells that had had the top half shorn away by hungry fishermen ran with moonlight like wounds in the dark rocks, an ooze of mucous fire. Biccles produced some burgundy.

We all drank from the bottle. The wind had died or we were sheltered from it, and a clouded warmth suffused my mind and the bushes of straggly moonlight, the garish sand.

"I'm as good a man as Shakespeare," went on Biccles from some infinite silence abruptly buckled up. "It's not a question of who's the cleverer. I know he was cleverer. I'm not going so far as to deny that; but it's mankind that counts, and if I do one action for the solidarity of humanity I'm a greater man than Shakespeare; but anyhow what I mean to say is, why shouldn't a carpenter or a bricklayer be as great an artist as Michelangelo or Holman Hunt, if he gets pleasure out of his work; and surely it's his right to have a creative glory in his work, and if it isn't, then it's obvious the social system's all wrong."

Ruby was staring at him quietly; admiringly, of course. I looked more closely at her. Quietly, yes; but I could not determine what other emotion was expressed by that furious quiet. She was nipping off with her nails the grass-shoots beside her, blade by blade, meticulously, unhurriedly, searching for the extreme end of the blade against the root before she let her nails bite into its succulent resistance. She caught my glance and tucked her dress more primly round her legs.

"Walk," said Daisy to me. We rose. Ruby turned and stared at us with a quiet viciousness; when I looked back, she was still staring after us. Biccles was addressing her profile.

Behind the first bush we sank down. "Wait," Daisie said, and took off her shoes and stockings. She dug her toes into the cool sand and stood at her full height so suddenly, so suddenly all her body was struck with a muscular tensity of fragile grace, that it seemed incredible she did not ascend the buxom curves of moonlight, a puff of feathery rhythm, curled smoke of beauty. Then she tried to dance. But all the grace was gone; an ungainly and distorted, a pathetic ugliness of gesture. I tried to turn away my eyes, ashamed; but I couldn't. At last she gave it up. She tumbled into my lap and nestled there in a

bunched tangle of limbs, her head between her knees. She closed her eyes. At least she never asked for flattery, gave no explanations of her actions, as though their meaning ceased the moment they themselves ceased. Her strange world of small-girl flippancies and a strained and painful ideality was self-sufficient. Secure, I thought, in its uncritical delight, the harsh sensitivities of its melancholy, the something gracious and almost articulate bruised always by a bewildered smugness.

"Now kiss me on the eyelids," she said. She was so small that I could get my hand round under the soles of both her feet. She never laughed. There was no sentimental terror on her face as she steadily looked into my eyes. A question? I do not know. She gave no twitching sob, no moaning appeal; she was stoical even in love—emotionally, I mean, not physically.

She had her ideas of independence too, and insisted on paying our fares back on the tram. Biccles was alone when we found him, and he was still repeating, "She asked me herself the difference between Syndicalism and Guild Socialism, and I was telling her when all of a sudden she said, 'O, I've dropped my powder-puff case and pointed to something shining out there in the mud. Do get it for me,' she said; so I climbed down and after a lot of trouble fished the thing out, and it was the lid of a cigarette tin, and when I looked round I couldn't see her, and when I got back I couldn't see her either; and anyhow, she doesn't use powder, as I don't believe in it; it's a bourgeois vice. What could have come over her? She must be going mad."

The moon was just balanced on the tip of the hill before us. "One shove, and it'd roll down on us like a big snowball, and we'd die in an avalanche of moonlight," I said. But there was no wriggle of response. She was asleep on my arm, her child's mouth half open breathing kisses.

"She asked me herself to explain the difference," said Biccles.

Daisie liked music. She told me so. At the concert the Leonore Overture was played. Youth cock-a-whoop, Let's toss for laughter or for death, The moon's our tossing-coin, Kiss me, Adventure neighs, On centaur-back we'll go!

"What did it make you think of?" I asked.

"O, all sorts of things."

"What things?" I persisted; my vanity hoped to draw some imbecility from her.

"O, going for a tram-ride," she said.

I was charmed. Here, I thought, is a chance of seeing in what irresponsible ways the musical image will affect untutored minds. Had some passage suggested a tram realistically? "Go on," I said.

But she replied, "You think I'm a fool, don't you?"

"No, O no," I protested.

"Why did you ask me that then, O *so* condescending?"

"I wanted to know."

"Did you?" She eyed me with a drawn suspicion. "You're God, aren't you? You thought I'd say heaven or flowers or something like that. I know. I'm very funny. And I did love it. I did. But I don't care. How much did you truly feel about it or make up your mind you were going to feel about it?"

I do not like these questions of conscience, and I tried to turn the subject; but she would not answer. We walked silently along. I was annoyed; of course I had asked her out of the simplest motives of affection. I was sure there was no supercilious intention; the more angry I got the surer I was of it. I gazed up at the sky; the patterned stars seemed threaded together like the holes punctured in a pianola-roll. Music of the Spheres. I was proud of the conceit and opened my mouth to get her applause, usually expressed by the feline method of rubbing her head against me; but I paused. Damn her plebeian resentment; at the gate I would make a curt remark and leave her without a good-bye kiss . . . perhaps never see her again.

But she moved into my arms, and stayed there, stiff at first, then suddenly collapsing, as though the arched kiss had been fractured by some spiritual blow. She was weeping. Her small self-possessed face was piteous as I raised it to the moon and began, despite her efforts, to kiss away the tears.

"You don't really think I'm a fool, do you?" she pleaded. "I'm sorry—O!" She twisted out of my arms. "I did that well, didn't I?" she called out gaily, bitterly, from the top of the stairs. "Think I'd cry over you, you bloody fool!"

But there was a salty taste in my mouth.

Her voice always had something of that resentful anger; its happiest notes would unexpectedly jar their bells on iron. Out of the rosy gauzes broken by the bubbles of music bursting explosively on comedians' noses and rhythms that charmingly slapped the bottoms of chorus-girls, I heard it.

I had been forced into taking Rose to see the revue from the gallery. "Such fun," she had declared. We had been late, and got seats on the side at the back, where we could see a few yards of the stage. I turned my head and stared right into the eyes of Daisie. And I did the wrong thing. If I had nodded nothing would have happened; but in the panicked thought what a nuisance Rose would be if she noticed it, how she would tell everyone—I could hear her voice, "Who's that common little girl?" . . . and, "Yes, fancy what a surprise I got, such a common little girl . . ."—I looked quickly away. I cursed myself the second after, but I had already cut her. I could do nothing now, anything else would only make it worse. Every minute of the play was a beat of remorseful misery—my mind slithered about in a wash of uneasy music and jokes I could not catch. I felt a futile idiot, but I did not know what to do. Daisie would never forgive me. The confession that I was afraid to acknowledge her before a girl socially her superior would hurt her deeply. And I loved her sincerely now. The childish and baffled aspirations, the serious grace, the angular gaiety, the precarious assurance of her character, her supple body, seemed to me all that was desirable. Given the chance what sombre or glittering qualities might one dredge from the leashed violence of her spirit. And I did not care a damn for Rose. I had been pushed into taking her to-night against my will. What would it have mattered what silly nonsense she had gabbled about me?

At the end, Rose pressed into the same aisle as Daisie and her friend, who I now saw was Ruby, looking my way with a quiet happiness of malice. As we neared the entrance, I lagged behind, Daisie turned round and said to Rose in her hard suppressed voice, smiling, "Would you mind giving this handkerchief back to your friend, he left it under my pillow the other morning. Peter's so careless. Thank you so much." Then she was gone.

"Who was that common little girl?" said Rose. "O Peter . . . "

An Act of Will: Chapter the Ninth.

There was no one to see me off. I sat frightened in the carriage, watching the couple say good-bye, a muttering secrecy of unsatisfactory kisses. As I bought a newspaper I saw a pear-shaped tear roll down from the closed eyelids and mix saltily with the kiss, greedily absorbed, no doubt with a sorrowful relish of symbolic bitterness. The vast impersonality of cigarette-and-fruit boys, the grudging porters, the disconnected fumes of noise lost in a roar against the flat roof cobwebbed with smoky windows and the fringe of an unwashed sky—all oppressed me with an inconsequential hostility. My relief at a lonely departure gave way to a dull jealousy of the lovers ugly with tears and feeble caresses. I bit my nails. I dug a long thumb-nail under the torn nails of the forefinger so savagely that I gave a small yelp of pain, which I liked. I hurt myself again.

This was my first real adventure into the action of life, and I was frightened. I was setting out for Sydney with about ten pounds in my pocket and a vague determination to make my living by freelance journalism. The sheltered conceited existence of the undergraduate was gone; with the guard's whistle it would be blown irrevocably into the past. I was deliberately forsaking all the plans for an academic career hatched by far-sighted relations; I was choosing possible starvation, and I was frightened. If I was willing to look a fool, it was not too late to return; and I longed for the signal which would settle this problem of the will once and for all by launching me towards Sydney, city where I might starve, where the chance of desirable and merry mistresses full of subtle perversities of laughter was immeasurably increased: sphynxes of cosmopolitan vice, especially attractive to one whose philanderings now appeared, compared with a love episode adequate to the literary sense, the merest figments of a rustic kiss.

At last the whistle came and cut my life in two.

There was a grinding jerk, a recoil, then the train moved forward with a motion that to my released will seemed inexpressibly smooth and sweet. I felt plumes of air stroke my face and my shut eyes; and my doubtful fears drifted into a distance of my consciousness, like the baffled babel on the platform. My mind was arched over by a cool and narrow darkness down which I hurried to an invisible escape of light. I was free, in a river of silence, of streaming darkness. I was free, and I was going to Sydney, to starve, to meet wonderful whorish ladies. In a sudden wincing return of mistrust I fumbled in

my coat pocket to make sure my ticket was safe; it was there, and my money; and my bag and overcoat were safe above my head. I was safe too. I shut my eyes again, luxuriating in the darkness of the wind, the mental silence that rode, like an heroic ship, the clattering waves of recurring noise.

For awhile I sprawled content in this hammocked peace slung gentle amid clamour, the clingclingclangcling of the wheels. Tiredness lapsed into pleasant inertia, into complete indifference. I would not have moved one inch aside from any lopping death. Peace moved warmly in my belly, warmth moving outwards, the relief of a physical tension lifted, like that experienced when a too tight belt is loosened.

When I opened my eyes I was looking out over the rubbish-dump with its ramshackle sheds at the Brisbane River slipping between the fig trees as smoothly as if light were a rolling canvas stretched over it, through which the broken edges of foam's ripples could not break. Then it glided out; and we were passing through suburbs of weatherboard, fowl-runs, peppercorn trees, and a girl with holes in the heels of her stockings, who couldn't reach the peg on the clothes line.

I glanced at the girl opposite. Her heavy eyes were unaware of my scrutiny, as she blew up over her upper lip at a fly that had landed on her reddened nose. This proved ineffective, and she brushed the fly off pettishly, screwing up her face.

Indooroopilly Bridge. The girders switchbacked past us; the river, found again, lay broadly beneath, a ridged pattern of streaky greys. It was there on the left I had brought my flat-bottomed rowing boat in, with my gaily inquisitive Irish terrier, to loiter about near the Sunday-couples, proud of timidly flaunting my untidiness beside the immaculate badly-cut clothes of the clerks, sure that the girls must admire my poetic negligence, when they did not even think me humorous, I suppose. . . . Up and down that reach I had often rowed, hoping to see some impropriety through a back window, to meet by some divine accident with a blue-eyed girl who knew Keats by heart and who would say to me, as her first words: "Heart of my heart, our heaven is here, is won."

I had never forgotten the thrill of once seeing, while practising in a school-four quite near the city, two figures rush out of a door on the south side and roll, gasping kisses, down a green incline where a pawpaw tree stood with a hole where one of its brittle branches had come away. She was in a pink silk nightdress; she beat him off, amorously. He had on a murderous cap pulled over his face. A brothel. Another girl in a yellow chemise, with a lace nightcap, appeared at the back door and swore at them. She saw us. The master who was coxing, reluctantly told us to row on. How the other boys envied us when we got back to the shed.

I thought it an incredible romance, a momentary glimpse of a mythical condition of literature, not in any way actual; and I used to go down Albert Street, sometimes with a friend, generally alone, to watch the harlots sitting out at night under the wheedling purr of a gas jet, showing their legs and most of their breasts, some painted with a caking red upon mealy

white powder, some fresh and young and, to me, fabulously lovely, gartered with all the luxury of the world in pleated scarlets and cockaded blues. They sat on their bench, stolid in the waxen silence, betraying nothing of the conventional Russian misery, but not very interested. The uncertain light played tricks of beauty on them, putting pools of shadows, of folded mystery, into their laps, and then bailing it out; and running a finger up and down their calves in silky high lights as they crossed or uncrossed legs or sat with knees wide open. They smoked, and at times would sit impassively for minutes; at other times they would giggle and talk; sooner or later they always said something to me and I blushed and hurried on. I never properly associated them with real life. They were on show in the gas-lit booth of my fancy, exhibits in a museum of uncanny poetry; and though I often saw one of them take a man in or let him out, through the small door inside the big galvanised iron gate, beyond which lay a cottage, I never made any particular visualisation of what occurred within. For me the whole thing was a bleared drama produced by myself in a dream of silence. I must have looked extremely grave as I watched the dirty lace of these women and girls, expecting some strange revelation of violent poetry, some swift gesture of tragic grace, which was never made. For they never did anything but sit happily amid a finery of bedraggled nudity behind some plate glass of incomprehensible silence, smashed every now and then, as by some brick, by the disconcerting ribaldry which sent me home.

But that did not really disturb my mental picture of these inscrutable and dull women squatting in a complacent apathy on my mute vaudeville stage, eternally waiting for nothing. They stood for some heroic conception of baffled poetry, of the image of lyric love here woefully bedaubed, unrelated to the restless fears and desires that mingled in my blood, yet somehow expressing them.

They were like a copy of *Bluebeard* I loved and hated as a child for its illustrations. I used to hide that book, kept by some unformulated tabu from destroying it; and always someone or other would find it and bring it back to me. I would force myself, in their presence, to be thankful and turn over the loathsome pages, which fascinated me. Then when they had gone, I would hide it once more in another place.

Past Graceville, where, lying on my stomach on cool linoleum, I had read the *Ode to a Grecian Urn* through at the age of eleven, for the first time finding a heady ecstasy, an indefinable flush of pleasure which tickled so that it made me sneeze again and again. I cannot recall what effect the words had intellectually upon me, but I grasped some body of convulsive music in them, that marked my first true response to art: one that I did not regain fully for years.

The interminable drab bush bleached, green flat sharp and ragged bunches the lanky trees. Leaves coloured with the reflected lights of grey soil, gritty brown, with the sap of roots set in a hard dryness. I kept a look-out for any object that might leap into my mind with a full-blown literary phrase

attached. I was still a little worried by my inability to achieve anything like a trance-condition by even the most lengthy and piercing contemplation of a daisy, a willow tree, or a mountain. I tried to convince myself for a time that I did, but that passed once I was old enough to realise the vulgarity of carefully-staged thrills before the bleeding hecatombs of a sunset. By breathing with a rhythmic fierceness, and by clenching my finger-nails into my palms, with a general muscular intensity, I did occasionally mange to get tears into my eyes and experience at least a passionate disdain for all who were not, as I was, rapt in this stertorous exaltation, even if I were too busy feeling disdainful to register much of the rapture.

So I wrote Wordsworthian verses. One came back to me from the neat booklet, bound by myself, where I had transcribed it with a note insisting on the authenticity of the emotion. I remembered . . . I had run out of ink and put some vinegar to mix with the dried dregs in the bottle, so that the printed letters looked very rightly anæmic:

Shy violet peeping from thy stone,
Oft thy small pout of grace is sung,
Yet seems it that I first have known—
This white wart hidden in cow's dung

I added hurriedly, in an effort to win back self-respect by ridicule; but in a meek voice, a sheepish whine, the words kept wavering up into my consciousness, a voice meekly rebuking. I tried to read, to evade my Wordsworthian past. I had taken three books only with me out of all my shelves: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *Creative Effort*, and a Greek text of *Theocritos*—a choice based partly in a wish to make a defiant gesture; partly, I believe (despite the scepticism of memory), in a genuine need. I started on Nietzsche, but as he always produces in me an over-mastering desire to shout, to climb on to the top of the nearest rostrum, Zarathustra's mountain peak, and harangue the tiny and fading earth in a shattering recitative, I was forced to stop.

I shut up the trumpeting mass of type, opened *Theocritos*, and looked out of the window again. Nature. Theocritos's peasants were real enough, they were no bucolics stinking of idealised sterility, but of good peeling dirt mixed with heaven's windy blossoms of light—not so strange a minglement as fools think. . . . Nature.

We Theocriteans do not seek from earth any suspensions in a coffin of plankt air nailed round the numbed senses, and mistake that dark of inertia for a pantheistic bellyful of God; do not let the spirit flow out of the pores of the skin in a primitive submission to the tug of sunlight crawling through sap; or believe the giddy feeling of levitation, gained by standing on a high and empty place, an accession of magisterial virtue.

We are not quite so shallowly vain as all that.

Only in Nature's essences absorbed through the five sucking senses—climbing trees and the plumes of sunlight, sudden colours dazzled with wind, all blown together in the jumbled silver of skies marbly with clouds; and trees sweeping generalisations by the moon; on horseback, or with the spindrift of danger on the face—only from such impressions replanted in the

mind's fantastic soil do we find any mysterious whiff of heaven. Looking on Nature itself, we look on no sown and grafted bits of God, no secret unity looping grass-blade and mountain crag, which will gradually shake out the individual forms like sand in a crumble of divinity. We want to see the tree more beautifully, more essentially, a tree; not a shape of smoke misting into the homogeneity of God.

I felt again for my ticket. Fear gushed over me like a new skin of tingling cold. What did it all matter? Nothing matters. I hammered this automatic courage on my mind, trying to fit it to the rhythm of the banging train, but there was some syncopation of fear still. I could not achieve a perfect chime with the rhythm of the rushing universe, and the clang of metal like the whole cruel machinery of the world seemed mocking me. I felt drained of will, flung in a hideous box across a darkness of rattling pain, never to stop, never to get out, caged in a ringing anguish, in death's metallic rattle. It is horrible to be really hungry; and I was going to be so hungry. For I had made up my mind on two points: I would not take a regular job, I would ask no one for money. What was my poetry? Trifling stuff. I tasted the sickly spittle of fear. I didn't want to think. But how? O so unfair. The girl was looking at me. Did I show any sign of the exquisite sensitivities of my mental conflict? Surely. I returned her glance. Surely the profound and melancholy tenderness of my eyes would proclaim me no common prize. Even now I discover myself at times thinking that women want to suckle poetry at their breasts. She went on reading her magazine.

The thickets of slaty green flashed on paddocks of a green scorched by dung, drifting to rich rolling downs. But I was tired. The throb that had sliced across my nerves ended by dulling them. I did not care. I do not care: I repeated, less as an affirmation than as a test. But no acid repudiation jangled up from my subconscious mind through my blood. But I was not brave. I was tired.

REQUIEM

by JOHN E. FEATHERSTONE

Cut the heart out of the dead old man,
  Tear out the still heart that fed the unquiet brain,
Lest he talk again, being dead, with the deathless voice of Bran
  Lest his tongue curl in music and he utter words again.

Bury the old body in Westminster: we have cut out his stubborn heart.
  Pray to God for that soul which ever denied God's ruth,
Your heart and silly old head, Tom Hardy, shall rest apart,
  Lest together they restlessly stir and your sweet mouth utter truth.

INTERVIEW

by BRIAN PENTON

EVELYN AVELON, singing in her bathroom, gurgled to silence on a high note and suspended over the whirling floods of the cistern by clinging firmly to the chain as she gazed with blinking incredulous stupefaction at a piece of crumpled paper. Somewhere, she felt sure, she had glimpsed the words Paul Nolan. She must have: why should she think the name of the man otherwise? As close as her fastidious scruples would allow her she peered into the fragment of the *Champion's* front sheet, and caught there a few scattered phrases which, in her own expression, intrigued her—something about "a promising artist destined for" something. The cistern dribbled on to the edge of the paper, and, waterlogged, it capsized slowly, revealing a splash of big type YOUNG ARTIST SUICI before it turned towards her a prose poem on Blaud's liver pills.

She looked about for other pieces of the *Champion*, but found only the sporting page and a lot of dull advertisements. The paper was a day old; gone of course.

Evelyn swore and turned away to perfume her hands at the porcelain basin with a vile pink soap. As she fiddled with the cool water, blowing bubbles up under her thumb, she wondered if it really could be *that* Paul Nolan, Michael Nolan's son. Probably, probably. Vague shadows, full of misty sensations derived from the soap and the water and the breeze panting in from the garden and a tune that slid through her memory, curled back upon her mind and cloaked the pale interest of speculation, almost stifling it. But, inspired suddenly by the thought that the word SUICI probably was suicide, she thrilled to the possibility of being closely connected with death, and notorious death, too, apparently, from the size of the headings.

Nolan, to be precise, had fallen half-drunk out of his third-storey window.

Her heart warmed towards Paul: he had climbed into the papers. This pride in him brought an extraordinary vitality to her mind, and she thought of one thing for more than two minutes. Almost, indeed, she became conscious. How delightful if it was Paul, she decided. Why, it wasn't impossible that he might have committed suicide because of her. She was rather rude when she saw him last Saturday; no, Sunday wasn't it? Anyway she was rude. Hope blossomed extravagantly.

She dried her hands and hastened back to her sitting-room, and across the landing called, "Mrs. Pymbolt, Mrs. Pymbolt. Will you send the boy up the road to see if he can get a yesterday's *Champion*? Yesterday. Tuesday's. Yes. Straightaway, please."

The story rather disappointed her, after all. It sounded silly. If he'd committeed suicide for her she could have understood, but because someone wrote an article about his horrible old pictures—ridiculous. It was a nice article too, nice and long. But he always was a bit mad.

She flung the paper down angrily. It wasn't fair: it was like being left out of a scene when you'd rehearsed for weeks. She wasn't even mentioned in the article, though he had always threatened to leave a note ruining her when he killed himself. Of course he must have called out her name when he died, but there were more Evelyns than she in the world. He ought to have remembered that, thoughtless pig. She spurned the *Champion* viciously with the toe of her slipper, and her hideous dog, Wopples, proceeded to tear it up. She did not reprove him.

Suddenly her heart was too full of anger and misery, and she burst into tears. It was the injustice which made her despair. She was hard enough to stand most things, but when people turned back on you like that, well it was too much. You couldn't trust anybody. She stamped her feet into the carpet, and the dog came bouncing back to her. "Go away," she said, pushing him from her lap. "Go away, you're a damned fool." He was. All words were one to him, and he proceeded to do his only trick of standing on his hind legs and grinning. Evelyn relieved her feelings by kicking him over violently, and he expressed his enormous delight with convulsive tail-wagging. Great joke.

There you were, see—even the dog was ungrateful. The tears burst out again, and new indignation fumed in her heart when she realised that her eyes would be red. A poor girl didn't have a chance unless she was looking out all the time. People stabbed you in the back and took the ladder away from under your feet. Why, O why, hadn't she written letters to Paul promising to marry him and making him promise to marry her. She would have had a fair claim on his family then. Good for a couple of hundred, especially if she'd got a few letters out of him! And the papers! ROMANCE ENDS AT THE GRAVE—WEDDING BELLS AND FUNERAL KNELLS. That's what they said about Maisie Cane when her boy died, and look where she was now. Photograph in soap advertisements. Big vaudeville contract. O why did Paul drink so much rum that he never had any money to encourage her? That was all his fault. She sobbed and swore again at the memory of Paul, and flung the cushion at Wopples, stunning him.

Sobs and hiccoughs of grief clapped a membrane over her ears, so she did not hear the first clamours of her door-bell, almost torn from its screws by the assaults of Mr. Edgar Ripples. Driven to ecstasies by the noise which oozed through the cracks, he kept his finger to the button, pressing all the blood out of it and making his hand quite numb. But he had no physical sensation whatever. He was transported on pinions of colossal delight when he could no longer doubt that those gasping unintelligible words were an expression of great grief. For Mr. Ripples was chief feature-writer of the *Champion* and an expert in human-interest stories.

Wopples heard him first and made a great show of defiance, achieving a sort of peace with honour by backing into the kitchen and behind the stove after tempestuous snarling. Evelyn called in a pitiful voice, "Who's there?" for that was not

impossibly Mr. Murgatroyd; and Mr. Murgatroyd, who dealt prosperously in bedsteads and kept Evelyn here, was very amenable to soft ways, shrinking violet tenderness, and melancholy. But no voice gurgled, "Only sweetie. Only me, duckie." There was no sound at all. Mr. Ripples, having removed his finger from the bell, was listening. "Thank God," she muttered, and, rising, blew her nose. Mr. Ripples recognised the commotion of powdering and rouging in the rustle of clothing and the patter of feet which reached him through the light door. She was covering up the traces of her tears. He hoped they had left a good, unobliterable mark on her. He warned the photographer.

And he really did feel almost satisfied when she opened the door and raised to him great blue eyes inflamed and liquid. She looked a little sullen and annoyed, but that was natural. Mr. Ripples expected it. He felt keenly his position in having to intrude upon the sacred privacy of grief, but he enjoyed it, too. She thrilled him. She had done good work with powder and rouge, but they did not hide the print of sorrow from him. He had a nose for it, and a fine discriminating taste. Not only did he see sorrow everywhere, "mingling with laughter, sobbing through smiles"—it was his own phrase—but he knew the exact pitch and news value of every kind of anguish—of the sobs (to quote him again) which tear a widow's heart, of the tears that burn in the eyes of men under the shameless cover of night, of the cries which convulse a broken-hearted child exposed to the slings and arrows, of the grief which lacerates the tender breast of a girl who has known that something worse than death. Values changed, but Mr. Ripples knew that the misery of a girl Cheated by Death was worth all the anguish of war-widows, raped young ladies, repentant forgers, or even of murderers on the eve of hanging.

Evelyn was what he referred to as A human document of ineffable sorrow. He stood there reading her, probing down into the valuable shadows of pain and trouble which deepened her eyes.

She, impatient, was just about to spit, "Here, come across, what are you staring at?" suspecting him of having brought her a summons for debt, when he bowed and presented his card.

"I am, you see, Edgar Ripples, Feature Writer, of the *Champion*. I have called to express my paper's deep sympathy with you. We understand you were his . . . his intimate friend."

Delight exploded in her throat and she chopped her teeth shut just in time to prevent herself exclaiming, in the first rush of pleasurable surprise, "God, boy, you're the cat's whiskers!" Indeed she controlled her reflexes admirably, and her great blue eyes, so courageously clear and still, wavered and filled. A tear pressed up under her lower lid and burst down her cheek, slowly tumbling over the fine curves of her face and giving Mr. Ripples the impression that it was travelling a tremendous distance at tremendous speed. It tickled her rather unpleasantly, like a fly crawling, but she inhibited an impulse to wipe it away. Mr. Ripples watched it greedily. A little sphere of sorrow, a burning crystal of sorrow, a crystal distilled from sorrow.

He mentally noted a dozen phrases in the seconds the tear occupied to make a detour round the cheekbone and lose itself in a dimple. It left a wet gleaming trail, and her face was softened to an irresistibly pathetic vacuity of suffering. She closed her eyes, pressing the lids together in an endeavour to squeeze out a little more moisture. Then she opened them more eloquently than ever.

Mr. Edgar Ripples recovered from the daze into which his delight had momentarily bludgeoned him. Calling to her to "Hold it, hold it," he beckoned down the passage to a young man who had been adjusting the lens of a camera expectantly for the last few seconds. "Don't move, please. Please don't move," he asked, moving away from Evelyn and advancing again. Her heart gulped and quivered before the too magnificent truth that they were taking her photograph for the paper. Admirably, again, she repressed an impulse to trill her little scream of delight, and she gripped her emotions sufficiently long to have them recorded on three plates. Then she allowed her lips to tremble apart. "What are you doing? O why do you want me?" she murmured unsteadily.

"*Champion*. Photograph. Special article. Five column portrait. Front page," Mr. Ripples explained. "Paul Nolan, you see."

Fewer words would have explained the situation graphically to her, but she made a decent pause about it and, pulling out her handkerchief, buried her face in it and vibrated her shoulders. "Poor Paul," she moaned. "O poor Paul. O I can't, I can't. Not a picture. It would be sacrilegious."

Mr. Ripples made free to pat her shoulder, and continued the consolation when he felt through the thin silk of her kimono the velvety warmth of her flesh. "Not at all. Not at all," he assured her. "The best people do it. All famous people have their portraits in the paper." He tore a copy of the *Champion* from his pocket and revealed the block-page pictures of cabinet ministers, Chinese generals, and rotarians. Evelyn stared at the page and lost herself in wondering how her tragedy-queen smile would stretch across five columns.

She capitulated reluctantly. "All right. If you don't think it would be disloyal," she said.

"Of course not," said Ripples, soothing her with a hearty thump on the shoulders. "Now to business, Miss Avelon. I came on business as well as sympathy."

"Won't you come in?" Evelyn invited, opening the door, and he entered, brushing against her firm lithe body. The photographer followed and collapsed into a chair. A soulless brute. No sense of tragedy. Mr. Ripples sat close to Evelyn on the chesterfield and looked into her eyes.

"Well?" she murmured, glancing down at her hands folded across her knees held firmly together. Mr. Ripples made another mental note that she was simple (in the best sense of the word), and sensitive, and ingenuous.

"I come," he said gravely, "to give you an opportunity to strike a blow in the crusade for, shall I say, your sweetheart?"

He whispered the word and was encouraged by the appearance

of a globule of moisture on Evelyn's left cheek, the last, she feared, she would be able to squeeze out for the moment, unless he gave her an opportunity for hysterics. Quiet crying was very hard. "Did you know," he continued, with stirring intensity, "that he was murdered?"

She did not know, but she hid her mild, almost disinterested surprise under the shadow of stolid melancholy.

"Yes. Murdered by prejudice and jealousy and ignorance. Read the *Champion* and you'll see all about it."

Evelyn sighed. "I can't bear . . ." she murmured, and to hide the lack of a tear brought out her handkerchief again. Mr. Ripples was fairly young and very enthusiastic. He could not withstand those sobs. He wanted to hug her. His delight paralysed his tongue: for a moment he paused. Fearing that she had overdone her part a little and discouraged him she relented, and removed the handkerchief from her face. "Go on," she wavered, staring into the wall. "I'll be brave."

"Yes. Be brave for love," said Ripples, hoping to wring a little more misery out of her, but her eyes were dry now and they did not move. He made another note that she suffered silently, undemonstratively, and took out a piece of copy-paper. "Had you known Mr. Nolan very long?" he commenced.

"No, not long," she murmured. "Last year. I heard a noise outside one night and found him at the door. He collapsed. He was very sick. I dragged him to the couch. He could not talk."

"Seriously ill, no doubt," suggested Ripples.

"No doubt," said Evelyn. She did not think it necessary to explain that Nolan had said next morning, uncurling himself from an uncomfortable pose on the little chesterfield, "Local rum, my dear. Bloody awful. Bloody awful."

"Was it love at first sight?" Ripples whispered.

She stared into her lap and he just caught her reply, "Yes." In fact, it was pretty well love at first sight, for in going through his pockets while he was asleep, an hour or two after he arrived, she had discovered a crossed cheque for some respectable amount, signed with the name Michael Nolan in a scrawl a famous beer label had made familiar. Everybody knew Michael Nolan. Nolan's Three X Bitter and Nolan's Antler Lager were, as the advertisements declared, household words in a torrid land. Besides, he had been the villain of a famous breach of promise case a few months before. Everybody envied him. His beer flowed like water—yes, just like water.

The moment she identified Paul she fell in love with him, passionately. Mr. Murgatroyd's beds, especially his patent collapsible four-poster—it makes brides happy, soothes slumber and brings pleasant dreams to over 1,000,000 homes—provided her with a comfortable living at the moment, but Mr. Murgatroyd was bald and unsafe and he had a vixen of a wife. Now Paul, or even his father! Her ambition flared.

"Did you know who he was?" Mr. Ripples asked. "Did you know he was a most promising artist, destined for . . ." She recognised a paragraph from the *Champion's* article.

"No," she said. "Not then." Indeed, she had been astonished

next morning when he told her that he was a painter. A painter! Michael Nolan's son a painter! She must have made a mistake about his parentage. But she tried to be nice to him. "Do you hang wallpaper too?" she asked. He laughed, breathing horrible repelling fumes of rum over her, and explained. He offered to paint her portrait. She told Ripples that much, and he scribbled a note about the "artist's gratitude."

"Did he ever talk to you about his ambitions?" Ripples demanded after allowing a short pause for sad reminiscence.

"O yes, often. We used to talk things over together." Yes, Nolan used to call his father a mean old swine and end by assuring her that he was on the verge of death, anyhow. She wasn't so certain of that from what she heard in the chorus, but she let him convince her, for that was in the days before she learned the truth about the implacable rage of old Michael, and gave Paul up. Paul used to talk a lot, envisioning huge inspiring pictures of a house in which they would live snugly, surrounded by hundreds of rooms stored inexhaustibly with rum and whisky. He drew plans of a system by which beer might be reticulated from the brewery. "Yes, often," she said, remembering these things. "He was fond of dreaming."

"Ah, he was an artist," said Mr. Ripple, who pictured artists as people perpetually glaze-eyed with contemplation of things floating about in the air like motes and called The Ideal.

"You were engaged then, of course." He suspected that there might have been a secret marriage.

Evelyn could not repress a gust of professional delight, which swept all pain from her eyes. "Yes," she cried, bouncing round on the chesterfield. "In *Lady Be Good*. Did you see me? I had a *pas seul* at the end of the second act." She beamed on him.

"*Lady be Good!*" he exclaimed, dazed. "*Lady Be Good! Pas seul.* Second act. You're not . . ." He paused and stared at her, and for the first time examined her coldly. She observed this scrutiny and the change in his manner, and it annoyed her. She stared back. "I say," he faltered at last. "You're not a chorus girl, are you?"

She revolted from his tone of anxiety. "Of course I am," she exploded. "Did you think I was a bloody whore?"

Candour like that really was unmerited. It struck Ripples dumb. He had to cast about and form a new set of opinions. She wasn't after all a simple little business girl supporting an aged mother, who had fallen in love with a picturesque artist and agreed to share with him the trials and miseries of obscurity and the triumph and spotlight of fame. Not that he personally objected to chorus girls, but this took all the point out of the story. People had such terribly preconceived notions about chorus girls even now, that you couldn't picture them dedicating their lives to a starving artist. He had been misled by her manner and the fact that she was living up here in this respectable remote suburb, tucked away by Mr. Murgatroyd's jealousy.

"Well, you goggling bonehead, what about it?" Evelyn demanded.

Ripples was thinking hard. "Personally," he smiled con-

ciliatorily, "personally I think there is no better occupation—artistic, strengthening, and in the public eye, but I'm afraid you'd have to be a companion or a shop-girl to get this story into the paper. You see we want to have a smashing sob-stunt."

She laughed at him. "Gee, boy, haven't I sobbed? And what do you want a companion for? A companion! God, you'll want a virgin next."

"O they have the right kind of reputation," he explained.

"So you won't be able to write a report or to use the photos at all?" she asked, staring at him now through eyes that looked as though they had never melted in tears since the first anguished moments of infancy.

"Well, you see it wouldn't be so good a story. People might know you were in the chorus."

"What a shame," she said earnestly, and crumpled her pretty forehead into deep wrinkles of vexation. He thought so too, staring into the floor in search of an equivocation. Their attitude to each other and the atmosphere of their interview had changed completely. The little lace-frilled handkerchief lay on the floor, and Wopples, encouraged to emerge from behind the stove, carried it off into the bedroom and tore it to shreds. No one noticed him. The photographer had gone to sleep with his feet on the table.

Inspired suddenly, Ripples clutched Evelyn's arm. "I say, have you got an aged mother handy?" he asked hopefully.

"Not that you'd notice, thank God," said Evelyn, laughing again. "I'm an orphan, though."

He waved her suggestion away. "At your age!" He crossed his knees and bit despondently at his nails. "Blast," he said. "A picture like that would have carried the story. Aged mother having her head stroked and so on. Pity."

"I might manage the picture," said Evelyn. "But what's it worth? Couldn't do it under a fiver." He promised that sum and they shook hands on the bargain. "Good," she said, and hurried out on to the landing and called down the stairs, "Mrs. Pymbolt, Mrs. Pymbolt. Will you come up for a minute?"

Ripples heard a cheerful fat voice answering, "In a moment, dearie. I'll be there in 'alf a tick," and almost at the heels of Evelyn Mrs. Pymbolt came panting and wiping her face on her apron. Thus blindfolded she stumbled over Ripples before she noticed him, and, recovering against the wall, tottered round, dragged the apron from her head, and glittered a smile which made him feel that she knew something funny about him.

Ripples was appalled. He had never seen a smile so engulfing. It split her face from one ear to the other, tightening the skin so severely that her eyebrows curved and beetled as though they were the conjunction of violently conflicting forces. When the smile had spread as far as it could go, vibrations rolled down from her throat to her breast into her stomach, and she choked out a guffaw of delight that brought the dog inquisitively from the bedroom and awakened the photographer. Appalled! Ripples was devastated. Such cheerfulness he had never before encountered. There was nothing touchingly maternal about

that smile. He turned miserably to the photographer and explained what he wanted.

"That's easy," said the photographer, who had had experience in the movies. "We'll easily settle that."

"But she hasn't got white hair," Ripples complained, "and look at that laugh."

"Don't worry," said the photographer. "We can touch her up afterwards. I'll put her in a bad light, anyway."

"Certainly, dearie," Mrs. Pymbolt was roaring. "I'll have me picture took with you, certainly. But let me take off me apron and put on me feathers first. Aw, why not? I always put me feathers on for a photograph. Go on. They're real ostrich feathers."

But Evelyn was implacable, and Mrs. Pymbolt cheerfully relinquished her feathers at last. "Never mind, Mrs. Pymbolt. Next time you can have your feathers," she reassured herself as she submitted to being adjusted in the chair. She rustled and panted, crushing herself into a pose, and to prove that she did not resent their inhibitions upon her plans for decoration, smiled broadly.

"Now then, ladies," called the photographer, "hold hands. Don't smile, please, Mrs. Pymbolt."

Mrs. Pymbolt started up, affronted. "Don't smile!" she exclaimed. "What d'you mean. Don't smile!" she demanded. "Isn't this a photograph?"

"Of course. But it's a serious picture, madam," the photographer explained. "Sad, wistful."

"Now whose leg d'you think you're pulling, young man?" asked Mrs. Pymbolt angrily. "I've had photographs took before you was born and the man's always said 'Smile. Yes. Look for the dicky bird and smile.' And I'll look for the dicky bird and smile or I won't have no pictures took at all."

"Please, Mrs. Pymbolt, for me. Look tender," Evelyn pleaded.

"Not for Old Nick himself I wouldn't," said Mrs. Pymbolt. "I think you ought to smile and look cheerful in a picture. It's right and proper."

They all pleaded together.

"No, no," Mrs. Pymbolt decided very definitely, obliterating all remnants of pleasure from lips drawn and tight. "I'll be photographed with a smile or I won't be photographed without one. Take it or leave it."

They took it, for the photographer assured Ripples from under his curtain that it could be retouched easily. To assert herself Mrs. Pymbolt smiled all the more exasperatingly. She almost uncovered part of her skull. Ripples groaned.

She went off complaining and slammed the door angrily.

"We'll manage," Ripples reassured Evelyn, "even if we have to put another head on her. Thanks anyway."

"O that's all right," she said. "Only too pleased to give old Paul a kick-off. Anything else I could do?"

Mr. Ripples considered. His quick brain whirled round the possibility of creating sobs since there seemed no chance of collecting them gratuitously. "Well you could," he said.

"One thing. You could go to his funeral and weep to-morrow. It'd make a good impression anyway. Have dinner with me afterwards?"

"Goodoh," she agreed. "I'll come. Will there be a reporter at the funeral?"

"Of course, and a photographer. There'll be a big crowd, too."

"If you're going to weep at the graveside, miss," the photographer suggested, "keep as near to the hole as you can so that no one will get in front of you. Don't stop till I cough, either."

"Right," said Evelyn. "Now have a spot."

They drank their whisky and soda quickly and hurried to the railway station. Ripples sketched the outline of a touching story on his way back to town.

And they did not find it necessary to put a new head on Mrs. Pymbolt.

Ripples explained to the artist what he thought most touching. "Something patiently anguished," he said. "The nobility of suffering and resigned age and that sort of thing, you know."

"Like this," suggested the artist, producing an illustration to an advertisement for back-ache.

"Exactly," said Ripples. "That's the thing. Perfect."

"Pretty easy," the artist assured him. He turned the picture upside down. "A line here and a line there. A little shadow under the eye. Whiten the hair here and there and you have it."

It was done.

THE FO'C'SLE CRY

(A CHANTEY)

by TREVOR BLORE

Sail or steam,
Sail or steam,
"Blow, you bastard, blow!"
When the wind rides high
'Neath a lowering sky,
From each fo'c'sle mess
It's the same old cry—
"Blow, you bastard, blow!"

Rain and gale,
Rain and gale,
"Blow, you bastard, blow!"
While the look-out's tread
On the fo'c'sle head
Echoes this cry
Of the great unread—
"Blow, you bastard, blow!"

HATE

by JACK LINDSAY

Scene One

A cavernous gloom broken by a jagged opening in the stone rather high up. It is near the end of day. Two men are moving about, arranging a kind of dais at one end. They are Hanskuld and Orm.

HANSK: It's dark. Light up that torch there.
ORM: Darker soon.
HANSK: But not for him.
ORM: Pitchblack: and not one star
To twirl upon a spear-point.
HANSK: Fool!
ORM: Glittering
Is half the noise of a wild spear.
HANSK: O light it.
ORM (*still fumbling*): Stones in the dusk grin into rugged faces,
Far more alive than all the shrubs of wind—
At bat-time; it's the darkness, not the silence . . .
HANSK: There'll be good clamour here and smoky blood
Before an hour's out.
ORM: I can't find the flint.
HANSK: It's there upon that ledge.
ORM: I've got it now.
Unless the roof falls in, one clot of silence . . .
Or can he hear the rust come blotching out
And the slow mouldy sinking of his face?
HANSK: O light that torch there.
ORM: I've seen rotten oak-roots
Fluttering with toes of pointed fire
After the wind has died and the dusk opens
Like a big cave: the moon——
HANSK: Dead men see anywhere.
ORM: This resin will not catch. Here, strike the flint,
For I can't do it.
HANSK (*taking it*): They are very late.
ORM: Perhaps flesh rots to suchlike pricks of flame.
HANSK: Helgi had gone to look for something—a spear,
His favourite, I think—to leave with Thorfinn.
Not often are there friends so great as those.
ORM: I stood by at their blood-friendship.
HANSK: Dead men see.
There's fire about them all though you can't see it.
Round some it's like a whistling of blue swords
So quick and many that the air is whittled
To anvil-flashes, being the quick thought
Of courage they have smithied in their hearts.
Others are stung round by a shining pain
Which is their evil following them about,
A burning cloud of wasps, to make them face
The things they have done. And that's how dead men see—
There's the torch kindled.

ORM: Stick it in that stanchion.
I'm in no mood for funerals to-day.
[*Turns to climb up to opening.*]
HANSK: Where are you going, Orm? hey now, come back.
ORM: Just to the top to see if they are coming.
HANSK: This torch burns weakly.
ORM (*turning back*): There's too many of us
Breathing in this room.
HANSK: There's only two.
ORM (*coming down*): What? only two!
HANSK: That's all here.
ORM: Only two!
HANSK: Here, let me see if they are coming yet.
[*Climbs up.*]
ORM: It's here still, a fierce image of black branches
Charring across my eyes; and then it turns
That hunched-up stone upon the hillside opposite
Blessing the earth in malice every evening,
With a lopsided bulge. That's how it seems—
Deep evil endlessly amused at something.
I understand the wolvish evil prowling
With fangs over the world, and green-red eyes,
But not this peaceful chuckling evil . . . blessing me
To make me cruel and helpless and yet frantic
Until I break to pieces hurled on stone.
Last night——
HANSK: I see them now—and you . . . what's wrong?
Thorfinn was a great hero and his funeral
A thing not death could black out in your eyes.
Death who picks out our thoughts like a boy scraping
The kernel from a nut must leave such honours
Untainted in the sockets of our pride.
ORM: You don't know anything about this death—
How can you tell what kind of thing its grip
Will freeze or thaw you into? Stones or trees . . .
For I grow strange and crumble at some thoughts
As though there were great clenching hands and I
Only a mud-sogged twig they held. . . . You turn
If I say *Hanskuld*—that is you, of course,
And that's the name you answer to at mealtimes;
My dog could say as much. But all those thoughts
Coming like death to change us with mad strangeness—
Where's the strong-fisted and gay-faced chatterer,
When death strips off your face like scum from water,
And lops your two strong fists off, and pulls out
Your long tongue from its roots like a dead mushroom?
Will you be gay and brave and a chatterer then?
I stop and listen sometimes as I'm talking
And wonder whose voice it is.
HANSK: You're trembling with cold,
And think it's fear, that's all—I know you, Orm,
And that it's but the creak of chilling bones.

ORM: Hanskuld, we've been good friends . . .
HANSK: To tell the truth
I don't like this place either; but I've found
When a ghost brushes out of untoucht air
Against your elbow, that the easiest way
To rid yourself of him is: take no notice.
They always go if you just take no notice.
ORM: I once sat on a hillside watching shadows,
Merging and grabbing softly at each other
And twining in and out the patient jaws—
Half-drunk I was, and they swelled fleshly flabby——
VOICE (*outside*): Ho, Hanskuld, ho!
HANSK: We're ready, all is ready.
[*The procession climbs stumbling down through the opening. The wrapt corpse of Thorfinn is carried on the shoulders of some men. Among them are Helgi; a Priest of Odin; Haldor, a Skald; and a bound captive.*]
HELGI: Enter O Thorfinn your last bed of rest,
Upon the shoulders of these men that loved you,
With me who loved you welcoming you in.
[*They put body down. Some start arranging things in the background. The rest dispose themselves to listen.*]
We must admit it, though against the grain:
In death there is disgrace, since all must die.
Whether like sows or farmers we root in earth
Or fatten her with spouts of kingly blood,
Whether we laugh or weep, whether our hands
Play in the long sleek hair of sleeping queens
Plaiting it with gold thread and yellow petals,
Or whether the dry hair of oven-wives
Roughens our thumbs along with jibbing ploughshares,
To death we stoop. Then there is a disgrace
In death, however we may argue of it,
A lack of strength or foresight.
For no matter
How we may argue, how we call it nobly,
We must all die at last. Therefore I say:
Admitting death to be an utter shame,
We can turn back the shame on those who willed it,
By dying contemptuously and merrily,
And with a red sword aching in our hands.
But whosoever flinches when death comes,
The shame recoils upon him, and he dies
Suddenly mockt-out by the gods' thick laughter;
While he who, striving not against the law,
Disdains the law and makes of it a jest,
A bloody wild and cunningly angry jest,
His death-yell splits the shouts of rowdy gods
Like a stout dragon-prow the wrangling foam
And comes clean out the other side. Not many
Die so whole-hearted; but so Thorfinn died.

MEN: Aie! . . . Aie! . . .
MAN: I saw a Valkyr-face shine in my shield.
HALDOR: I saw the trees
And all the hefted leaves
Sharp in the clear morning
Beneath the sparkle of hooves
That splashed upon the tarn
Hunting down heroes' lives.
I saw the leaves turn spears
And heard the waters raving—
The storm of swords was nearing
Along the steel-blue groves
Of the sharp windy morning.
It was a place for brave dying,
I felt a Valkyr's hand
In my hair roughly straying
And in the plunging wind
Bodies of quick fire neighing—
Girls of the naked air
And horses on sunlight grinding
Bridles and chain-links jarred.
O hoisted with which joyous maiden
Through death's bright skies did he ride? . . .
Dead, but unafraid.
HELGI: Therefore he is not dead. He has met death
And shrugged her to one side, and has passed on
Into a battle far beyond our hands.
For he who clenches deeply his defiance
To fill a merry rage of reckless doing,
Fords the mad torrent at the one sure point;
And no one, not a god, can bid him back.
O he is braced in sinewy delight
With all his body melted to one thrust;
And so he gains the gods' shrewd mastery
Of mingled anger and laughter. But the man
Whose will is broken by his cowardice
Betrays the cleft wherein they push the spear
And turn him over to the mists of hell.
PRIEST: Praise to the gods who made their law so just
That man may match them with crosst swords or axes
And hack some bolts from their divinity;
Yet they remain as godlike, he unscathed.
HALDOR: Nothing can hurt a man save his own fear.
PRIEST: Praised be our gods who made this law for man,
This hard exultant law: for we are weak
And swayed to pity and the need of peace,
So that a lesser law would sap us wholly.
HALDOR: Each man must die alone, all truths end there.
PRIEST: Praised be the gods for death. Though one has said
That death is shame because beyond our will
Yet it is therefore man's sole task to see
His death the last perfecting hammer-stroke.
HALDOR: Death fits the last stone in, or ruins all.
HELGI: O Thorfinn my blood-brother O my friend,

If death should make of all our clattering life
The suddenly tempered sword, an arrow twanged
Upon a certain aim, a breachless wall,
A ship free from its rollers—all that comes
Beautifully to that thing which it desires—
If death be this, and you have rightly died,
How can death part such friends? O Thorfinn
answer.

PRIEST: Praised now be Odin that beneath his ash-tree
Listens for ever, glistening in the shadows,
To the dark turmoil of the quarrelling world
Which he has made to quarrel and to perish——

HALDOR: And live again in richer loneliness.

HELGI: There is much gold on earth in curious shapes,
On sword-hilts and the veiny hair of statues,
And carvings wrought by little knotted gods
In sooty tree-boles. There are women also,
With long drapes making thighs look very long,
Women with mouths that open so in drinking
They suck your body into shuddering halves
And you fall down a gulf of your own softness,
Ebbing for ever wetly. These there are,
That we may never rest, that we may love
And hate and quarrel. But the end of all,
The one thing not ordained to make us mad,
Is friendship—if it stands above the lure
Of jewels splintering the air with colours
Or women drinking wine with thrown-back heads—
Takes them when they are wanted, but will turn
To any call of friendship and will toss
The jewels to the foam's unknitting rainbows
Or leave the women moving with long thighs
About an empty house.
And if I called,
Thorfinn would come, despite all women or gems,
Such friends we were O Thorfinn O my friend.

PRIEST: Praise be to Thor who treads the hills of thunder!
And the fire trickling from his smitten shield
Is the keen tendril of the lightning-vine
Whose bruised fruits are the bodies of slain men.

HALDOR: He makes a marsh of flesh beneath his feet.

PRIEST: Praise be to Tyr, whose hair is the Sun rippling.
Praise be to Œgir, who smacks the sea to fury.
Praise be to Baldur counting the star-tallies.
Praise be to Heimdall, who hears the moon moving.
Praise be to Fryggia and her big breasts feeding
All mouths with milk, and welding earth with life.
Praise be to Freia, kindling all to beauty
And coupling beast with beast and god with god.

HALDOR: Praise be to Bragi
Singing by the apple-tree
And the strings of sunlight
Thrill beneath his hands.
Praise be to Iduna

Who loves him and is tending there
The apples whose bright juices scour
Time's smoke away.

HELGI: O all you gods, I will not bear it longer.
Here is my death, I cry to you this challenge.
Here now I die, thus far flew the arrow,
Thus far the song lasted. The last word is sung.
I have shot into the air the burning arrow,
I have sung the song, and it was merry.
Here the arrow quivers in the oak-tree,
And the song is ended. What of me?
Shall I wander on, unarmed and mournful—
Now my shield is pierced, my chain-coat riddled?
Shall I go on mute into the forest,
I who fought so well, and sang so well?
No, you point the way and I shall take it.
This the death with which I choose to defy you,
Here beside my friend who died so bravely,
Here I die and join him once again.
You shall not sever us, you fools and jealous!
I shall join him underneath the ash-tree,
We shall enter both into Valhalla.
You cannot sever us and still be gods!

[*He sinks into corner.*]

PRIEST: Odin, we have brought to you this body,
Thorfinn, that has served you well and nobly.

HALDOR: Thorfinn, we have brought you here to Odin,
You who served him well and insolently.

MAN: Thorfinn, we have brought you spears and axes.

ANOTHER: Thorfinn, we have brought you sword and dagger.

ORM: Thorfinn, we have brought you shield and helmet.

HANSK: Thorfinn, we have brought you casks of ale
That you may sniff the fumes and laugh with madness.

HALDOR: Thorfinn, we have brought you all you need
That you may even raid the crag of heaven
If entrance is denied.

PRIEST: And we have brought you
A sacrifice, this man, that from his blood
You may lap strength and be no longer blown
Among the winds a pale and starveling ghost.
Bring forward here the captive that's to die.

[*They pull him forward struggling.*]

CAPTIVE: O spare me O I swear that please now——

PRIEST: Gag him!
And lay him there.

[*They put him on a stone-slab.*]

Odin, who made the Earth
And all the Stars to blow like leaves along
The heavens: Odin judging on the grass
Under the crystal shadows of the Ash,
With your full-armour burnishing the green:
Odin who with a wand and a loud voice
Choose out the men within whose hands has moved

The purpose of a god in government
Of mortals hoeing earth for belly-needs :
Odin who love the white-winged ocean-steeds
And strong hands on the tiller in black seas
Beneath strange stars, when *Fryggia's Distaff* spins
In a new sky-room and the *Winter's Way*
Loads other ribs of air with its faint snow :
Odin whose eagle perched above the Sun
Loves shield-storms on the Vikings' water-fields
Where the sole crop beside the barren foam
Is lovely bodies drowned by their own mail
And heroes who will not let drop the sword
Though they are thereby dragged to the deep weeds :
Odin my sword-king, from beneath the Ash
Behold this sacrifice, Lord, and approve.
You have appointed Earth a mighty meadow
Where men may laugh and drive the hazel-rods
Into the soil to show the battle-ground,
And then go on and die between the hazels.
Life is worth nothing save for desperate laughter :
Therefore accepting life as nothing worth
Unless made holy by the light of swords
Burning like torches out of jolted hands,
And man the merest tinder of that flame,
We sacrifice this life to you, Lord Odin,
Having no better gift to give to you.
For human life is less than that of sheep
Unless picked out by destiny's fierce luck—
And the gods care for those who must die well
So that they may not die before their time.
Then no man worth preserving dies like this ;
And by it we proclaim your uttered truth :
Man is a stain upon a splendid sword
Which must be cleansed by blood, and angrily.
We sacrifice this man then to you, Odin,
To show how little we regard our lives
Save as the luck of courage orders them ;
And should that pass us by, let man then end—
Let all the skerry-guards of your hid pleasure
Sink, and the waters take us with one gulp.

HELGI (*rising*) : They lie who say that in long years to come
Ragnorok falls, and with it the world's twilight
Settling in snow upon the gaunt black trees.
It is among us, and the world has ended.
It broke with my friend's death. When Thorfinn
died,
All judgments jangled into the stark pain
Of fettered life condemned at last to bear
The knowledge of its past and of its future ;
And therefore life was judged and life was ended
For Thorfinn and for me, though not for you.
And therefore I must die as well as Thorfinn.

PRIEST : Is the man now placed rightly ?

MEN : Aie, he is.

PRIEST: Then I shall sacrifice him to great Asa.
HALDOR: And I shall sing the beginning of all things,
Since so the mood is on me and my tongue.
In the beginning a void
And the void of the beginning
Was neither darkness nor light
But was a void divided
Between two brooding wings:
Nothing for evermore
Was the beginning of things.
Nothing was broken in half
And between was the void:
The void was turned about
And fell within, instead
Of bounding the outer side.
But Nothing for evermore
Spins at the heart of things.
In the beginning a void
And the void brooding wings.
Back to the cloven tide
The waters flow.
The great wings balancing
Lift up the wingless void—
Burning towards the South
In ripples and curved fire
Out of the infinite roundness
Of light consuming light—
Dark towards the North
In slow contracting thews
And the thick icy ribs
Of darkness congealing darkly—
The wings lift up the void
Turning within and within
And light and darkness meet.
Aoi! for the edge of battle
Where blood in a dark tide
Smokes on the glittering sword
And the poised courage swinging.
The waters of crisping light
Strike on the venomous waters:
The hissing foam writhes ever
Into the snapping bones:
The waters meet for ever
And hiss across my flesh.
The darkness scums the crystal
And the pure flames are muddied,
They whirl in spotted hatred
Thicker and thicker misted.
In between cracks the void—
The flapping light and darkness
Quarrel across the void,
And the end is the beginning.

[*The man to be sacrificed, over whom various ritualistic actions are being performed, gets his*

gag loose and screams. He is held down and silenced.]

The void is filled but still
The cleft of nothingness eddies:
The freezing scum pours in
And thaws to scuffling blood.
North clangs on South, the darkness
Melts on the edge of beauty
And twisted scales of colour
Flake from the cloudy mountains.
Endlessly scurfed with darkness
Light veins the thickening limbs:
Darkness is sculptured with fire,
Light is fattened with evil,
Till out of the twining vines
The Giant Ymir is matted,
And out of the dull darkness
The Giant Ymir is hewn.
Ymir sleeps on the anvil
Lighted with flashing hammers,
He groans in his sleep and dreams
And out of the sweat of his armpits
Two forms slime into being,
The race of Evil is born.
But the clash of darkness on light
Which smeared this anguish here
Is the clash of light on darkness
Which brought another to birth.
The sons of Bor have arisen,
They harry the sleeping Giant—
He dies, and his blood bursts forth
And drenches space with its rage.
His sons are choked in the flood
And all things soaked in its dyes,
The venom of dark red blood.

[*The man to be sacrificed screams again. Then he is killed. The Priest remains busied over him.*]

All save one Giant of evil,
He and the sons of Bor.
But the conquerors seize the body
And hurl it in the void:
Of the body of conquered Evil
They shape the tumbled earth.
They carve the rivers and oceans
And fill them with his blood,
His bones hump into mountains,
The splinters are the stones,
His skull the vault of the sky
Held up by the four dwarfs
And lit by holes of light.
One day the gods were walking
By the rotting shores of Evil,
They found a little piece of wood

Floating upon the sand.
They hacked it into two and made
Man and Woman out of it:
These salt-clogged Images they endowed
First with the thin spark of Life
Receding deeply back to them;
Then with movement and the power
To know the Secrets of that life;
And last with the slow wavering senses
Flittering back through all to Beauty—
And so were Ask and Embla made.

[*The Priest comes back into the torches' circle of light.*]

PRIEST: The auguries are not good from this man's entrails.
HELGI: I will not have it so.
PRIEST: Then dare the gods
Who have so told me in this victim's entrails.
HELGI: I do not care, and Thorfinn does not care.
I am to die with him. I shall not go,
But you shall wall me in here with my friend.
[*The men acclaim him, with clashing steel.*]
PRIEST: So be it as you will, and good attend you.
HALDOR: Aie, if the gods mean hardly, such an act
Should charm them to your side.
PRIEST: That well may be.
Now let us drink to Odin, and to Thorfinn,
And then depart. Where, Lodre, is the ale?
[*Man brings ale and horn forward.*]
First unto Odin let us quaff the horn,
In measure. Let each man drink till he view
The stud glint silver over the brown ale
Like the moon rising on a sluggish sea—
HALDOR: And be the Giant drinking up the sea!
[*The horn is passed round.*]
HANSK: Thorfinn could shoot with a blunt arrow through
A soft raw ox-hide hanging from a beam,
He had so strong an arm.
MEN: Aie, such was Thorfinn.
MAN: He could run up and down the bank of oars
While the men rowed his long-boat up the sound,
He was a Viking.
ANOTHER: Aie, the ancient breed.
HALDOR: Drink now to Thorfinn lying in his mail,
In solid plated armour, not in chain
Either sewn on to leather or close-linkt—
For he could wear it all a summer's day
And budge no more than any oak-tree up
Against the shafted winds, and then all night
Stand by the head-board steering the ship safely,
So thewed was he, and such his stubborn thought.
MAN: He could walk round the ship's rail while at sea.
ANOTHER: He could fight equally with either hand—
ANOTHER: Aie, changed his sword in midmost of a fight.
ANOTHER: He tossed it up and caught it and then slew.
ANOTHER: And he could cast two spears at the same moment—

ANOTHER : And each of them pierce just as deeply in.
ANOTHER : I saw him kill two men at once that way.
ANOTHER : And he could juggle daggers, three together—
ANOTHER : Two in the air, and one caught in his hand.
ANOTHER : He was the raven's friend in Odin's dress.
ANOTHER : Aie, Odin's fowls could tell him from afar.
ANOTHER : After the battle horses lapped in puddles
Of heroes' blood.
ANOTHER : He hastened to the Sword-thing,
Telling it from afar even as a raven.
ANOTHER : He left much food for those black witch's-steeds.
ANOTHER : I saw him kill King Harek Haraldson
Hacking the iron bark from that strong trunk.
HELGI : He was my friend, and he is dead O Odin . . .
I have a wife, and she is beautiful
As any woman dimpling to a kiss—
I have a wife, but I abandon her!
Let any man that will, get her abed,
I shall not hear her cries, I shall not care;
For friendship is a nobler thing than love.
And all my gear I give to him that takes it;
For friendship is a better thing than wealth.
I leave all this, my woman and my goods,
Henceforward to the living. I'm for death,
And the wild happy cruelty of standing
Alone against the comforts of the world
And comfortable love. Did I not know
That death is beaked and pitiless like fire
Shedding a husk each moment in its hope
To reach a harder and a swifter shape,
A purity of flame without its fuel,
I would not die, though Thorfinn is my friend.
But here I call on death, and here I cry
Welcome to the fire-beaks in my flesh,
Because I know the cleansing which will come.
Then to this cruelty of friendship joined
Like sword and arm against the moaning world,
I here submit myself. Out, all of you!
Out, lest you spoil the clearness of my rapture!

[*They hurry out, and fill in the few blocks. One torch has been left, Helgi takes it up, looks at it triumphantly and dashes it out. There is complete darkness and silence for a while. Then there is a scream followed by a furious clashing of swords which continues in a crescendo of fury till the curtain twitches down.*]

Scene Two

[*The curtain rises on the same darkness and furious clashing on which it went down. This continues for a while. Suddenly it ceases, there is a thud. Silence. Then light streams in through a torn opening about the same place as the former one. The interior is still very gloomy; some men climb in, Einar foremost.*]

Einar: A torch there! It's too dark to see.
[*A torch is handed in, he descends. After him another man with a torch. Others follow.*]
A musty tomb it is. What's this?
[*He sees Helgi standing up leant on his sword in the middle of the floor: a dark shape at his feet.*]
An image?
[*Helgi half lifts his sword.*]
By Odin, it's alive. Who are you, man?
And how did you get in ahead of us
To rifle this old tomb?

One of the Men: Aie . . . it is strange.

Another: There must be some hid passage.

Another: Where's the passage?

Einar: Who are you?

Man: Look how rusty is the armour.

Einar: Are you a warlock? or of the Disir,
And this your burrow? Speak up, man: who are you?
[*All wait curiously; at last Helgi speaks, dully and harshly.*]

Helgi: How long has this tomb lain here sealed?

Einar: How long?
O years and years!

Helgi: How long?

Einar: Who is there knows?

Skald: I know. It is the tomb of Thorfinn Haukson,
And with him there was shut in one, his friend,
Called Helgi.

Einar: Who are you?

Helgi: I was called Helgi.
How long have I been here?

Skald: A hundred years.
[*Helgi groans.*]

Man: He is not Helgi, he's a lying robber
Who means to send us frightened from the place
And take the gold and swords himself.

Helgi: I am Helgi.

Man: He cannot be. Let's slay him.
[*No one moves.*]

Einar: Wait a while.
[*There is a silence.*]

Helgi: And so it has been but a hundred years. . . .
[*Another pause.*]
And who are you?

Einar: I am Einar, son of Arnfin,
And I was born up North at Salten Fiord
Beside its narrow mouth where the tide makes

At ebb a ridge of foam-flails that would crack
The strongest hull like any worm-holed withy—
From which I learned to break men's spines across
My knee, and am called Einar Faggot-breaker.
Whether you are a ghost or warlock, now
Hear you my name which never yet have I
Refused to any asker.

HELGI: Is one here
Who knows the farm at Griotar?

MAN: I knew it.
I come from Orkedal. It was burned down
Some twenty years ago.

[*Helgi groans.*]

EINAR: You know my name;
Now know why I came here and made that gap.
It was to take the weapons of this fellow—
What is his name now?

SKALD: Thorfinn.

EINAR: Aie, of Thorfinn.
Because I am told that he was a fine raider,
As good as any were before my days.
I come to take his weapons and make them mine,
And with his weapons add to my own strength
What strength ran down out of the arm of Thorfinn
Into the quick steel—and as well to show
My power is greater than his spirit's power
And I can safely break his seals of death
And rob his spirit bousing in Valhalla.
And I have broken in, and I shall take them
Whether you are a spirit or a man,
A liar or a ghost rusted on air.

MAN (*who has been looking about*): I can't find any passage.

ANOTHER: Nor can I.

ANOTHER: Can this be Thorfinn come to bar our theft?

EINAR: No matter if he is, he shall not bar it.
Hold out your hand, my man, and take mine in it.

[*He grasps Helgi's hand.*]

Aie, he's a man, and not a weak one either,
Though he has sat a hundred years in darkness.

HELGI: I have not sat here.

EINAR: What were you doing then?
Snorting about the ocean as a whale
To wreck good ships at midnight with a flip
Of your wild tail? or muttering with ravens? . . .
It is fit that you were dead.

HELGI: Aie . . . that is so.

[*Einar lifts his sword.*]

But wait, for I must tell you all that happened.
I am Helgi, I was Thorfinn's dearest friend,
And when they buried him I had myself
Shut in with him that I might share his doom.
We had sworn blood-friendship. Here I cut my arm. (*Showing it.*)
And let the blood flow freely in the cup

To mix with his. This is the sword I reddened
With that mixed blood; and solemnly we stood,
Turf from his native fields upon our heads,
And made a bond of everlasting friendship.

EINAR: This does not interest me.

HELGI: Wait but a moment.
No sooner had they blocked the darkness in
Than up he rose, up rose my dead friend there,
And furiously attacked me in the darkness.
And we fought on and on I know not how
Or what dark passion grew enormous in us
To make us more than mortals, more than gods,
And nothing but the engines of dark passion;
But on we fought, though tired and wounded sorely,
Refresht with passion which was not cool strength
But was a deeper tiredness—yet we fought
And did not fall and die. And so we fought.
First from blind fear I fought before I knew
What I was doing, but my hands were fighting
Because I was attacked. Then suddenly
I knew that I was fighting with my Thorfinn
And that I did not know why I was fighting,
And then I knew that it could not be Thorfinn
And yet that it was he, and terribly
I found that I knew nothing of myself
Or who I was. And yet I fought from terror,
For now it seemed that Thorfinn was myself,
The dreaming self inside I did not know,
And still my hands fought on while I was thinking,
But fear was more than all the thoughts I had,
And was the only thought. If I had died,
If I had let him kill me then, perhaps
All had been well; but that I could not do.
Although I wished to end it all, I could not
End it by giving in; and so I fought
Although I did not want to. Then I grew
So weary that it seemed that ages widened
Between the moment when our two swords hit
And that when I could feel the slow dull jar
Bruise on my palm and slowly up the sinews
Until it reached my loosened shoulder-blade.
And further still and further all my mind
Dwindled from the slow frenzy of my body
Till I could only see the conflict here
Like the dim bubbling of a windy star
Tied to a pool by one thin thread of light—
And that was the worst agony of all,
While I was flattening against a dome
Blackened with the frail smoke of other souls
Which like mine faded out of that vague terror.
And I had almost faded when I said:
I will know who this Thorfinn is and who
This Helgi is and what are love and hate
That they are closer than two smiting swords

Separated only by the flash of smiting.
Then down I fell and staggered on my flesh
Still fighting wearily and Thorfinn too
Still fighting wearily, and at that instant
He grew as fresh as I and spoiled my plan
To get him down and find out who he was.
Yet now I fought with wary anger, now
For the first time the fight was serious,
For now he was my enemy and I needed
Somehow to trap him and to see his face
And in his eyes my face. If he had spoken
One word, I would have thrown my sword away
And known which man was which. Perhaps he thought
The same of me, for I as well was silent,
Though at the time I did not notice that.
It is only now I see that I was silent
As well as he; but carefully we fought
And now I hated him more than I feared him
And meant to hurt him in some savage way
I could not think of; for while we were fighting
My mind was running over the old days
And every cruelty that I had seen
Or heard of, or that I could now make up
Out of the mangled matters of the flesh,
And all seemed nothing to that huge desire
To hurt him which kept vanishing through my head.
Once or twice I thought I heard him moan,
Which pleased me and I pressed him harder then
And he grew weaker, less and less his sword
Met mine with the old anger. I grew cautious,
Being so near my wish, though all the time
My torment to find out some fitting anguish
Grew also worse. Then at the last it seemed
That I had found the image that I sought
And struck him down; and at that moment you
Broke in the stones, and so bewildered me
I have not looked upon his face as yet,
Which is the only thing I want to do,
And yet I fear to do it lest it hold
Nothing of all that I desire and fear
To find thereby. Nevertheless I look.

[*He turns to corpse, drops on his knee, and pulls round the face to stare at it. Einar strikes him at the same moment in the neck and kills him.*]

MAN: Aie . . . That was right.

EINAR: Whether he lied or no,
Whether he was this Helgi or a spirit,
He was evil and so rightly he is dead.
And now we have this place to strip—come on!
For no one, man or spirit, shall prevent me.
Look for gold vessels in the niche that end
And gather all the weapons that you see

But leave these men their swords. And you, skald, sing
To take the words of Helgi from our heads.

SKALD: O you three Virgins drawing
The water from the spring
Beneath the ash-tree's roots,
Pour down its precious dew
On me as on those boughs
Sticky with honey-stars——

MAN: Give us a better song than one of girls.

SKALD: I sing then the great Twilight,
The tolling of Ragnorok.
One boar is sliced and yet
The heroes are not hungry.
Sæhrimnir feeds them still,
And the one goat yields them milk.
But soon the shudder comes
For the wily hater has dug
Down to the void that cracks
Between the North and the South,
And winter shrinks on winter
Over the silent earth.
Then shall the Midgard Serpent
Untwine his oozy belly
And lash the quaking ocean
Over the earth with his tail.
The wolf Fenrir is loose,
He opens wide his mouth
Stretching from East to West—
He swallows the Sun for meat
And pastures upon the Stars.
Heimdall has heard the shudder,
Who hears wool grow on the sheep
Or a lazy kiss of lovers
At the other end of the earth;
And he has blown his trumpet
And the gods come trooping out
Against the army of Surtur.
This is the end of Valhalla.
But the heroes arise at the call
Buckling on swords and drunken
Wiping their nectarous mouths——

EINAR: Enough. Now we have all the things we want.
Let us go out and leave this cursed place.

MEN. Aie . . . Aie . . .

[*They all go out, and begin blocking up the hole from the outside, the skald can be heard for a while.*]

SKALD: But I see the walls of crystal,
Gimli shines in the distance,
And this is the cloud-land of lovers
Rising above Ragnorok———

[*The last block is in. Darkness again: at once the noise of swords begins afresh, furiously.*]

[*February*, 1928.]

THE SCYTHIANS

by ALEXANDER BLOK

AN ENGLISH VERSION BY THE EDITORS

[*Panmongolism! it is a barbarous word, but its sound caresses my ear.*—VLADIMIR SOLOVIEV.]

You are millions. No man has numbered us.
Can you take our dare? Listen and be wise.
Ha, we are Scythians! and our blood is Asia:
We have avid slanting eyes.

You need the accumulating years; for us
The yell of a sudden hour.
Long between hostile races, Mongols and Europeans,
Sprawled our mountainous power.

For centuries your hammering forges clanged
With a crackle of avalanches falling;
Yet you did not hear in the howls of Messalina
And Lisbon, doom calling.

For centuries you looked towards the East,
You grubbed for pearls about our shores;
And waiting, always waiting, for one hour
Your cannons pouted like sores.

That hour struck; and like an immense bird
Pain took the waning sky.
Perhaps the day will come when your pearls like bubbles
Will burst and die.

Be wise, Old World, while still you linger on . . .
Before you perish, halt and fear.
You are before the Sphynx, old Oedipus:
The ancient riddle is here—

Russia the Sphynx. The darkness of her blood
In exulting sorrow flows.
Always with hatred, and with love, always
Westward her gaze goes.

Your blood forgets the way love shrugs in us!
Deep in your past are lost such joys . . .
You have forgotten the love we know which burns
And which destroys.

All we love, all! facts and cold figures, science,
And passionate dreamings; and we seize
Upon the subtle Gallic wit and the German
Twilit philosophies.

All we remember: *Hell* in Montmartre streets,
In Venice winds from the sea,
The blown scent of orange-trees in bloom,
Cologne grimed smokily.

And we love flesh! the taste of flesh, its colours,
Its choking mortal smell—darkly it draws . . .
Are we to blame if your bones crack beneath
Our heavy gentle paws?

Our Cossack hands have muscles to tame wild horses
Plunging amid the dew,
To curb the jaws of restive colts of the Steppes,
And we can tame slaves too . . .

Take then our peaceful clasp—O come to us
Before it is too late.
Sheathe the Old Sword! Comrades and brothers now!
No war again, no hate . . .

If not—we know the trick of treachery,
And for us it will be no worse:
But for centuries of misery your weak children
Shall curse you, they shall curse . . .

Headlong across this Europe we shall retire
Through forests, through the fertile meadow-spaces,
And turn around upon you, grimacing
Asiatic faces.

Then let all come, let all come to the Urals!
That barrier a battlefield affords
Between the Iron Machines, the Calculus,
And Mongol hordes.

No longer then shall we hold up the shield
Guarding your unprotected side.
On that tumultuous smash of flesh we shall look
Slant-eyed.

Let savage Huns then grill your corpses, burn your towns,
Stable their horses in the churches there,
And grill the flesh of their white Western brothers . . .
We shall not care.

For the last time! to festal work and peace,
Old World! young days and nights—
For the last time to joyous brotherhood
The barbarous lute invites.

ENDPIECE, TAILPIECE COUPLET OR DISTICH

by ADOLPHUS BLAKE

"When sudden 'midst the yellow gorse
Appeared an homosexual horse . . ."

EX CATHEDRA

We started The London Aphrodite optimistically. We thought there would be an unlimited field of attack among the muddlepates of modernity. We were to that extent dupes of the illusion that Wyndham Lewis, etc., were really individuals. We never thought very highly of them, but we thought they might present sufficiently broad posteriors for a good kick or two. Without an organ for the dissemination of our bad temper we writhed in an impotent silence. Before the perverted perverters of taste and morality, before the bland opacity of editors and reviewers, we felt that a titanic struggle was possible, given the point of operation. Now we have the point, but there is no struggle. The lamentable confession that we have to make is that nothing can stop the clackiting of the Squanks hierarchy of typewriters, no prick can puncture the Eliotic complacence: the intellectual Della-Cruscans. What can one do before such mediocrities, whom nobody takes seriously, except reviewers? We believe that one of our finer poets has written a 30,000-word satire on R. Graves and L. Riding! One has heard of flies in amber, but what of pismires in a ton of lava! We congratulate the poet on the honest industry of his malice, but can only commiserate with him on the dullness of an age that can produce no better monsters for our pleasant scorn. We cannot love deeply without a commensurate anger and disdain. In the utter lack of anybody worth anger, we are forced back into intellectual vicious-circles of self-scorn, and that is too dostoevskian. We appeal for greater spiritual monstrosities, for finer social rancours and obscene indignations. Not for Celtic defæcations of dispersed attention *à la Joyce*, but the diarrhœa of joy in Rabelais. Not for snipy and piddling resentments disguised as impeccable taste after Eliot but good personal and social swipes as with John Churchill and Byron.

But this is only to touch on trivialities. As another and even better poet than the one mentioned above has said, what this age lacks is a symbol for Hell. Perhaps that is because it is in hell, and has exchanged dynamic symbol for an everyday triteness. By creating images of passionate happiness, then, we will force hell back to its rightful place as a poetic nemesis instead of a boring commonplace. But we cannot properly liberate those images without finding the unique basis of our suffering—that is, without vitally objectifying hell.

Perhaps this is why the individuals as cited above are so unsatisfactory as the material of hate or fear. Once they submit to the present abstract law, they become more and more like the common abstraction of the wheel. If in attacking them one feels disquieted and somewhat ashamed, it is because one cannot do "justice" without upsetting all internal justness of concrete equilibrium—because one is trying to state phantoms in terms of concretion, setting up dummies in order to have human beings to kick. This theme, here hastily hinted at, will be elaborated at length in the sixth and last *Aphrodite*.